



Starting projects

IN most areas where there are a few creches, they are packed full of children and overcrowded. The long waiting lists give almost no hope to working parents who urgently need their children looked after daily.

As there is little chance of getting their children into a creche, some mothers have taken this problem into their own hands. They look after their children at home. They also care for the children of two or three other families in their street.

The laws around child care allow a person to look after one to six children.

Some civic and women's organisations are considering starting their own child rearing projects.

These mothers who are at home, and who are interested in the education of young children can share caring for the children of their community.

At present there is no organisation who offers training for child minders or educational progress for the children.

The Early Learning Resource Unit in Athlone said: "We are interested in making contact with people who are caring for pre-school children in their own homes so that we can develop a course suitable for the needs of young children".

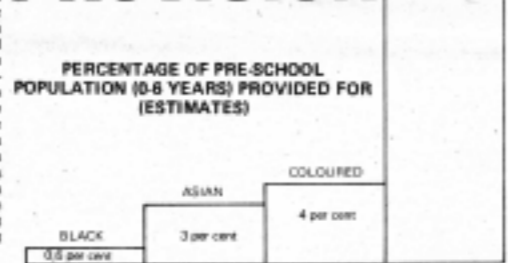


A HOUSEWIFE in Mitchell's Plain who helps out by taking care of the children of working mothers explained how she felt about the overcrowding problem:

"Ek kyk na 20 kinders van die omdorren van 1 1/2 tot 5 jaar. Die ma's bring die kinders van 7 uur en kees hulle kulle vir die laaste van 7 uur die aand. Om alken as 20 klein kinders te kyk is net niks grasie. Een van die grootste probleme is die klein kinders en feitlik geen tuis kante nie. Dit is regtig owerdowd as ons weet dat hulle plek van ons 'n groot probleem het met kranke."

We are all aware of the need for pre-school and day centres for the children of working mothers. It

SHOCKING PROVISION



is hard for a creche to be successful if they are run in small houses or rooms adapted for the purpose, as a woman who runs the Mitchell's Plain creche has stated. A survey of 1980 clearly shows how inadequately the pre-school child has been catered for.

Health hazards of overcrowding

OVERCROWDING in creches can lead to health problems. Johnny Jacobs goes to a creche where there are 50 children in one small house.

His mother was forced to go back to work one year ago because the family could not manage on her husband's low wages.

Johnny, aged two, has been sick many times since then. He has had diarrhoea (nausea stomach) twice. He always has a nasty nose and was admitted to Red Cross Hospital last winter with tonsillitis and bad catches.

GRASSROOTS spoke to a community

nurse who explained the health problems of overcrowding. She said that many sicknesses are spread from one child to another.

Diarrhoea is caused by germs which are found in the stool (shit) of a child who has the sickness. These germs can be passed on to a healthy child. This can happen when the sick child does not wash his hands after his last bowel movement.

He may then play with a toy and the germs are transferred to the toy. A well child who puts the toy in his mouth will swallow the germs and get diarrhoea.

Worms are also spread by very small eggs in the stool of a child who has worms, being swallowed by another child who plays with the same toys.

It is very difficult for a creche supervisor to check that children wash their hands every time they go to the toilet when there are so many children.

All these illnesses are made much worse when children are eating poor food and are underweight.

Mrs Kahn, the supervisor at Johnny's creche tries very hard to prevent illness. She gives them good food like brown bread and peanut butter, bean sags

IT'S no fun being a child these days if you have to play in a two roomed house all day, with fifty or more children of different ages while your mother goes to work. Houses crammed with little children is a common sight in our communities today. Why this sudden need for creches, nursery schools and day and play centres? What has given rise to the problem?

Previously fathers were breadwinners. Mothers stayed at home to care for and bring up children. With the rising costs of rent, electricity, transport and food, families can no longer manage to make ends meet.

for children of the mothers who work for them.

Although inadequately in some communities, the state makes provision for the six year old in the primary school, colleges and universities.

Why is the pre-school child not catered for by the state? The pre-school child has a right and a need as well. Of all the thousands and thousands of children in our communities, the health department has only 8 creches which serve 552 children and the housing department has 21 creches which serve 2 356 children.

Even when communities attempt to try and establish a creche the task seems impossible because of the red tape, rules and regulations with which they have to comply.

Neighbour

More and more mothers are forced to work to help earn the money necessary to live. And so the few women who remain at home oblige by caring for these children who are not old enough to go to school.

Unfortunately very often the neighbour cannot cope with the amount of children left with her. She has to be mother to every child in her care. She must do what the mother would have done; teach the child a language so that he can say what he wants and knows the names of things, to be potty trained, to eat correctly and play and mix with other children.

Important

It is a task of such importance, in fact the early learning years of a child are the most important years. If a child is taught many words he can build on more and more as he gets older. If he is taught to play fair when he is young, he will deal fair when he is older. Under the present conditions the task is hopeless.

Surely it is not the fault of the neighbour who is only helping out in a difficult situation. It is not the mothers' fault who has to work. Who then is responsible for the pre-school child?

The mother works for bosses, who take all the profit from her work. They should provide facilities

Teaching children to work together

PROVIDING child-care facilities is an important way to mobilize parents. But child-care is also important in another way.

Our children are the future youth and community leaders. Child-care allows us to start educating our children from a young age.

In schools, on TV, at the movies children learn many things - that to get somewhere in life you have to fight for yourself, that society has always been unequal and will always be so.

Thandazani Playgroup believes children can start learning different lessons. They can learn how to respect one another, to know that things can be changed but only if everyone works together.

This is done in many ways, and it is not only what you teach but how you teach that is important.

In Thandazani, for example, children take turns to serve cool-drink and it is often the big children who teach the little ones songs. In this way, children learn to be aware of, and to help one another learn.

Competitive games where the biggest or brightest children win are discouraged. For instance, musical chairs where children fight to get a chair is transformed into a game where only chairs and not children are "out" - so at the end all the children are struggling to hold everyone on one chair!

Working together is demonstrated by simple games - getting children to try to lift a large rock by themselves and then getting all to lift the rock together.

Childsalute is overcrowded conditions so they are aware from a very early age of the worries of parents - what happens when daddy gets sacked,

Solving the creche crisis

ON a Saturday in February twenty mothers from the town of Genadendal met to tackle a common problem of organising a day care centre for their pre-school children.

Genadendal is a community near Cape Town. Since there is no work in the town, residents seek work on the apple, peach and tobacco farms in the surrounding farm district.

This means that mothers and fathers have to leave early in the morning and arrive back late at night.

A day centre had already been established, aided by the local church. But this proved inadequate since it was already full, and being centrally situated, was out of the reach of mothers of outlying areas.

What was needed finally was a venue. The mothers sent a delegation to the church minister in Greyton, who allowed them to use a double classroom of the church school.

This venue was suitably accessible to the mothers who most needed a creche.

The second step was to find two or three people who would care for the children at the creche.

It was discovered that two young women from the community were unemployed and also were interested in caring for young children.

Under no circumstances would a child be turned away because the mother did not have R2.

The problem of equipment was soon overcome. Mothers donated whatever they could spare and which they thought the creche would need.

One mother had bits of material, which another mother agreed to stitch, with which another mother agreed to cover two foam mattresses, which two other mothers had donated. Empty cartons and old toys were gathered from people in the community.

The creche was to open on the Monday. It was decided that the children would receive porridge in the morning, a slice of bread for tea and a cooked meal of vegetables and cheap protein, like tinned fish or frikkadels or stew from

cheap meat cuts.

One mother agreed to prepare the cooked meal for that week. Each mother would have a turn to perform this chore the meeting decided.

Donations

The R2 would cover the food costs. As this had not been paid, donations of bread, pumpkins and milk were made to ensure that the creche would kick off to a good start.

Die Greyton Speed Sentrum had been established. But what was a creche without children?

Most mothers leave at 5 or 6 in the morning to be at their places of work and the children could not be expected to get up so early.

It was agreed upon that one mother who



WHEN the first 500 families moved into Woodlands in 1978 the newly formed residents association did a survey in the area which showed that the main need was a creche.

They applied for two classrooms at the high school which they got, and the parents of the children came together to run functions for funds to buy furniture.

Special workshops at which toys and musical instruments were made were run by the parents.

They elected an executive to control the creche's finances.

However, all major decisions are made by the general body of parents, who feel that the creche should not be used as a dumping ground by the parents who lack concern for their children.

That is why any parent who misses these general meetings in a row is asked to take her child out of the creche.

Family days are held so that mothers can get to know each other better and also get to know their children's friends at the creche.

When parents are so busy they come in to assist, often relieving staff so that they can attend workshops of their own. It is not only mothers who do this, but fathers as well.

Activities in the creche place the accent on sharing and caring.

Older children are taught to help the younger ones which also helps develop a sense of responsibility.

Children are not allowed to bring their own toys. They have to share the common toys of the creche.

Every effort is made to prevent racial prejudices from taking hold. For instance the song "No, No, Black Sheep" is banned because of its racial overtones.

The creche has been lucky to get a special long-playing record with songs that encourage them to develop healthy values. One out on the LP tells the children not to stare at others because of "fat noses and funny hair".

Another cut is about the importance of sharing. The children love to sing the songs on the record.

Recently when one of the creche children was knocked down by a car, the children staged a placard demonstration at the funeral.

The parents and staff run the annual party for the elderly people in the suburb.

Creche should not be used as dumping ground

In these ways Thandazani believes children can learn new and important things that will enable them to survive when they are older. For, in the end, "the children are the flowers of our struggle and the principle reason why we fight for a better life."