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A REPORT ON NON-PROFIT  
AFTER SCHOOL CARE IN THE  
CITY OF EDMONTON

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 At the meeting of City Council on September 9, 1981, it was agreed that the city should accept responsibility for subsidizing the after school care program for the balance of the municipal fiscal year, to December 31, 1981. This decision also accepted the offer of the provincial government to provide funding under the Family and Community Support Service program to the amount of \$233,330 for the period of September 1 - December 31, 1981. Although the provincial funding is available on the same monthly rate until March 31, 1981, the lack of municipal support beyond December 31, 1981 has thrown the future of the after school care program into considerable jeopardy.

1.2 The major difficulty is the impasse that presently exists between the city and the province over the level of financial support that is required to provide quality after school care. It is the provincial government's present position that suitable care can be made available at a cost of \$120 per child per month, while the city maintains that \$185 per child per month is the minimum level required. As long as this difference of opinion remains unresolved, the future of the after school care program will be in serious doubt; with the obvious losers being many of the approximately 500 families who are presently dependent on the existing subsidized after school care program.

1.3 In an effort to provide further information that could assist in maintaining the program, the Edmonton Social Planning Council was asked to investigate three major questions:

- is there a need for a subsidized after school care program?
- what are the costs involved in providing a high quality after school care program?
- what regulations or guidelines should govern the provision of the after school care program?

1.4 While discussions were held with some of the officials involved in providing funding for the after school care program, the major emphasis that was taken in approaching these questions was to draw on the experience and expertise of staff, board members, and parents involved with the present After School Care Centres. Consequently, interview schedules were prepared and a sample of both community and independent non-profit After School Care Centres were selected for interviewing. In all, two staff, two board members, and two parents from each of six community non-profit and two independent non-profit centres were interviewed. As well as representing a third of all the non-profit centres in the city, at least one centre was selected from each of the city's six wards.

## 2. The Need for a Subsidized After School Program

2.1 It was of little surprise to discover that all of the staff, board members, and parents who were interviewed were united in their belief that there was a definite need for a subsidized after school care program. However, it was appreciated that this view was not universally accepted, as some of the general public believed that to provide a substantial after school care program would lead to a weakening of the traditional responsibilities of the family. Supporters of the after school care program were quick to point out that this particular attitude towards after school care tended to ignore the fact that the two parent

family, with father as the breadwinner and mother as the home maker, was to a large extent a thing of the past. Instead, a fifth of all families in Edmonton are headed by a single parent and at least half of the women with children are now working on either a full-time or part-time basis. Further, it is evident that an increasing number of families are new to Edmonton and consequently they lack the support that could normally be provided by members of their extended family.

2.2 A frequent comment that was made by parents whose children were attending an After School Care Centre was that the high cost of living in the city meant that for many poorer families it had become imperative that both parents be employed on a full-time basis. For single parents the need to seek employment was absolutely crucial if they were going to be able to provide for themselves and their children. For many of the single parents the option of receiving public assistance was not one that they even wished to contemplate. As well they were aware that under the existing provincial regulations if they had only one child, their benefit entitlement would be limited to four months.

2.3 When parents were asked why they had their children in an after school care program, rather than some other form of care, the answers most frequently given were that the after school care program was reliable, affordable, supervised, and safe. The only alternative that was mentioned was babysitting but generally it was felt to be unreliable, it provided very limited supervision and tended to be very expensive, sometimes as high as \$200 a month. Many parents also mentioned that it was an unreasonable imposition to expect neighbours to watch over their children after school or during school vacations. As well as appreciating that it was illegal to leave children under the age of twelve unattended, parents were understandably concerned that if their children did not have the opportunity to participate in an after school care program, they could become involved in some of the social problems, such as vandalism and drug taking that are associated with unsupervised children.

2.4 Parents were also asked to explain what benefits they saw for their children in an after school care program. All were enthusiastic about the type of developmental programming that was available, as it allowed their children to learn new skills, to develop a sense of responsibility and independence, and to improve their ability to interact with their peer group. Some parents commented that the provision of consistent care for their child allowed them to experience a stable supportive environment, with its accompanying sense of security and belonging; often features that had been lacking in the child's home environment. Others reported that because of the opportunity to be involved in an after school care program, their child's self esteem had improved immeasurably, with the result that their enthusiasm for school had become much more positive. A number of single parents mentioned that their child's participation in an after school care program provided an opportunity for them to mix with other children from single parent families, allowing them to appreciate that their family structure was not as unusual as they might have thought.

2.5 To the parents themselves, after school care programs helped them deal with the dilemma of how they could provide financially for their families and at the same time offer the care and attention that their children required. Other parents commented that to them the after school care centre offered encouragement and support when crises developed in their already stressful lives. For single parents in particular, it offered an avenue for socializing, and the sharing of baby-sitting with other single parents who were using the centre. Some parents also commented that because the after school care program had usefully channelled their child's surplus energy, the quality of the interaction with their child in the evening was significantly improved.

2.6 In discussions with staff, it was apparent that the after school care program had an important intermediary responsibility between home and school. Difficulties faced by children in either environment, which often would go unnoticed, could be quickly attended to by the staff

of the centre, or be referred on to the appropriate person. Staff operating centres in schools also commented that teachers often remarked that children involved in the program seemed to show an improvement in their school performance and in their willingness to participate in class discussions. Further, it was apparent that schools with a declining enrollement were particularly keen to have an after school program operating within the school as it was seen as a way of encouraging parents to enroll their children at that particular school.

2.7 In attempting to establish a reliable estimate of the need for after school care, staff interviewed in all of the centres were asked if they presently had a waiting list for admission. Although one centre said it had a vacancy, the other eight mentioned that they presently had waiting lists of anywhere between one and thirty names. However almost all of the staff quickly added that because of the considerable uncertainty that existed about the future of the after school program, many parents were reluctant to register their interest. Some of the staff had also been discouraging parents from adding their names to the waiting list because of the program's clouded future. Clearly waiting lists at the moment are an unreliable indicator of need. While they may be of greater assistance if the future of the program is more assured, in various parts of the city it is important, given the increases in the number of single parents and the number of women with children who have joined the work force, that the City's Social Services are monitoring through the Municipal Census an anticipated need for the After School Centres in the various communities of the city.

2.8 A further concern that was discussed with those who were interviewed was whether they felt After School Care Centres should continue to give priority to lower income, single parent, and special need families. The majority favoured the retention of this priority system, although a number of those interviewed suggested that the centres should encourage children with a parent who was not working to attend the Centre as this would encourage a more healthy integration than was presently possible.

## 2.9 Recommendations

Given the increase in the number of single parents, the rise in the number of working mothers, and the high cost of living, the need for a subsidized after school care is well-established.

After school care programs provide a critical intermediary link between school and home, offer excellent opportunities for creative learning and peer group interaction and are a positive preventative measure of considerable benefit to the city.

The City of Edmonton's Social Services should be required to monitor, on a regular basis, the anticipated need for After School Care Centres in the various communities of the city.

## 3. Costs Involved in Providing a Quality After School Care Program

3.1 As outlined in the introduction, the present uncertainty about the future of the after school care program has arisen because of the fundamental difference of opinion between the city and the province as to what constitutes quality after school care. Based on its fifteen years of experience with after school care programs, it is the city's belief that quality care for school aged children requires a maximum amount of individualized attention and supervision. As a result they have required that the community non-profit centres hire well qualified staff and that they operate with a 1:8 staff/child ratio. It is these considerations which are behind the city's estimate that the cost of after school care is \$185 per child per month. It is the view of the provincial government that care for school aged children does not require "highly structured individual programming nor the same intensive adult supervision which is necessary in the pre-school day care programs". The provincial government found support for its view in an after school care program operating in Hamilton, Ontario, where the monthly cost per child was found to be \$120.

3.2 In reviewing the financial records of the After School Care Centres that were visited as part of the study, it was found that the present average cost per child per month in the community non-profit centres was \$167, while the independent non-profit centres were operating for an average of \$136 per month per child. The difference in the monthly cost figures was primarily accounted for by the fact that the independent non-profit centres have not been required to maintain the 1:8 staff/child ratio. In actuality the ratio in these independent non-profit centres has been closer to 1:10. It was also apparent that these centres were less well equipped than the community non-profit centres and as well, found it necessary to provide more structured activities and less individual programming for the children.

3.3 In discussing the question of the staff/child ratio with the staff, board members and parents, it was generally accepted that a 1:10 ratio would be acceptable. There is little evidence to support the view that a 1:8 ratio is necessary for school aged children. While pre-school programs provide early education opportunities for young children, after school care, as valuable as it is, does not require as intensive a level of support as day care.

3.4 Understandably, over 80% of the costs associated with after school care are concerned with salaries for the full and part-time staff. All of the Centres visited have a Director, an Assistant or Supervisor, and a number of part-time staff. Of particular concern to board members was the number of Directors who have resigned their positions in the past few months, primarily because of the uncertainty that has been surrounding the future of the program. Salaries for Directors varied from \$1,200 a month to \$1,650 a month. Given the level of qualifications that most Directors had - a university degree or a post secondary certificate in child development and two or three years experience in child care - it was frequently suggested that the salaries were rather low in comparison with other full-time staff ranged from \$1,000 to \$1,300 a month, while part-time staff hourly rates ranged from \$4.50 to \$7.00 an hour.

3.5 In discussing with staff and board members the type of qualifications that they thought were necessary for the staff to have, it was generally agreed that Directors should have had some appropriate post-secondary education but not necessarily a university degree in a child related discipline. A knowledge of crafts, drama, recreation, first aid or management were also mentioned in the interviews. It was also stressed of course that a Director should have an ability to relate to children and some experience of working with parents. Comments from those interviewed suggested that other staff members should have previously worked with children, should be flexible in their approach, and should have a good sense of humor.

3.6 In reviewing with staff and board members the shift pattern that each of the centres had adopted, it was customary to find two full-time or one full-time and one part-time, staff members available from the time of opening until the middle of the afternoon, following which time a further part-time staff person was added. It was generally agreed that this was a satisfactory arrangement, although a few board members raised questions as to the need to have two full-time staff employed in the Centre. It is therefore suggested that if economies are required, Centres could consider working with a full-time Director and an increased number of part-time staff. Further, as the periods of care before school and during lunch do not generally involve programming, but instead primarily supervision, it is possible that the suggested 1:10 ratio could also be relaxed during these two periods.

3.7 The provision of food in After School Care Centres was a matter of some controversy among those who were interviewed. Between \$1,500 and \$2,500 is spent providing primarily snacks and soup to children, although one Centre does provide a breakfast. While the amount of money involved is not great, concern was expressed that providing even a very limited service involved the purchase of items such as a commercial dishwasher, a stove, a refrigerator, and a separate snack preparation area. It was suggested that some aspects of food preparation and questions of nutrition were important learning experiences for children and as a result were

built into the program. However, others interviewed thought that if children required any form of nutritional supplement, or learning, that intervention with the parents would be a more beneficial approach. It is therefore suggested that if it is necessary to limit expenditures that consideration be given to eliminating the preparations of additional snacks, and that instead parents be encouraged to provide adequate snack items along with the child's lunch.

3.8 The majority of After School Care Centres presently occupy space provided in schools. In reviewing budgets and financial statements, it is apparent that there are considerable variations in the manner in which centres and schools have arrived at rental and maintenance charges. Although it is possible that the school boards will in the near future introduce a set rental fee, it would appear that already some centres are required to pay rent, while others have been provided with the space free of charge. Similarly in terms of maintenance some Centres must pay for cleaning while others have arranged for the school caretaker to provide the necessary care without payment. Clearly this is a matter that should be negotiated as soon as possible between the city and the school boards, and given the positive contribution that After School Care Centres are presently making to the schools in which they are located it would be appropriate if the space and the maintenance were provided by the School Board without charge.

3.9 The problems associated with purchasing new equipment was referred to by a majority of the staff members who were interviewed. Concern was expressed over the discrepancies that existed in the amount and quality of the supplies and equipment that centres had to work with. There were frequent examples mentioned where other Centres had made what appeared to be rather expensive and unnecessary purchases. Comments made also suggested that there was dissatisfaction with the methods used by the city's Child Services in allocating funds to some Centres for the purchase of equipment. A number of staff and board members proposed that tighter monitoring of funds for equipment and supplies was definitely required so as to insure a more equitable distribution of the money that

was available. It is therefore suggested that all non-profit centres should be required to apply annually for a capital equipment grant, with the maximum possible amount being set by the city, and that the criteria to be used for grant approval should be available to all centres.

3.10 A further suggestion relating to supplies and equipment that was offered by some of those interviewed was that a central resource bank should be set up. In this way bulk supplies could be purchased and stored and donations of such things as paper offcuts could be made available to all Centres. As well it would allow for the sharing between Centres of equipment that was not in regular use.

3.11 All the staff who were interviewed were asked to identify the supply and equipment items that they felt would be necessary in opening a new After School Care Centre. The lists provided were relatively similar with the cost varying between \$5,000 and \$7,000. Notably the provincial government in establishing its level of funding through the FCSS program has made no provision for growth funding. This should be a matter that is taken up by the city in their negotiations with the province concerning their 1982-83 FCSS funding allocation.

3.12 As well as financial support from both levels of government the After School Care Centres also receive funding from the fees that are charged to parents. In the non-profit centres all parents are required to pay \$40 per month with additional contributions being related to income. All of the parents interviewed were asked if they thought that the fees they paid were reasonable. The majority considered that \$40 per month was a reasonable amount for single parents to have to pay, although others suggested that provided the care was of a high quality, they would be prepared to pay more, such as 5% of their income, or up to \$200 per month, which is the amount that they would have to pay for baby-sitting services. A concern that was voiced by a number of parents was that the sliding income related scale did not take into account major expenses, such as mortgage payments, that parents were required to meet from their monthly income, It was suggested also that Centres could encourage some

children from among the non-priority groups to join the program and that provided the parent's income is above the subsidy level that they then be charged the full cost of care, rather than receive any form of municipal subsidy.

3.13 A funding concern that should also be addressed by the city in its negotiations with the province relates to the additional costs involved in providing full day care services during seventy days of the year; primarily July and August. It is understood that a precedent has already been established as the province has been prepared in the past to make additional funding available to After School Centres that were providing a full day care service during these additional 70 days. This matter should be a point of negotiation between the city and the province in reference to funding for 1982-83.

3.14 Although questions relating to the total funding involved in the After School Care program are rather beyond the scope of this study, it is possible to project the annual cost of after school care to the city. In January 1981 the provincial government reported that there were 497 children in all licensed or registered after school care facilities, although it was admitted that there may be additional school age children inappropriately registered with licensed day cares. Current figures are difficult to obtain. The 15 community non-profit centres have a capacity for 402, the six independent non-profit centres care for approximately 150 while the commercial day care or family day care centres provide a service for approximately 110. This gives a total of 672 after school care places throughout the city. The importance of this total is that one of the conditions governing the provision of provincial funds is that support must be provided by the city to all forms of after school care, and not simply the community non-profit centres.

3.15 Accepting that the average cost of care is \$167 per month per child the total cost of providing care for the 672 placed is \$1,346,688.

Revenue includes:

Provincial contribution through the FCSS program	700,000
Required 20% contribution from the city	140,000
Contribution from parents for children cocopying the 672 places, at an average of \$50/month	403,200
	<u>1,243,200</u>
Additional cost to the city	103,488

Notably these figures do not make any allowance for the cost of administering the program, estimated by the city to be \$200,000. Again this particular cost should be the subject of negotiation with the province for the FCSS allocation for 1982-83.

3.16 A final question concerning funding that needs to be clearly established is whether the after school care program qualifies under the terms of the Canada Assistance Plan for federal financing. The city should be willing to provide all of the information that is required by the province, in order to insure that the federal contribution to the after school care program, that is fifty per cent of the province's costs, are readily obtained.

Recommendations

- That a staff/child ratio of 1:10 be adopted in all after school care programs.
- That consideration be given to operating the After School Care Centres with one full-time Director and an increased number of part-time staff.
- That consideration be given to eliminating the provision of additional snacks in the After School Care Centres.
- That the city discuss with the school boards the question of providing space and maintenance free of charge to all After School Care Centres.

- That the city establish a more equitable system for allocating capital equipment grants to After School Care Centres.
- That consideration be given to establishing a central resource bank for the use of all After School Care Centres.
- That the city seek additional growth funding to be included within its 1982-83 FCSS funding allocation
- That changes be made in the income related scale for subsidising the cost of after school care, so as to take into account major expenses that must be met from the parent's monthly income.
- That the city seek from the province funding to cover the additional cost of providing a full day care service during the 70 days of the year that it is required.
- That the city seek additional funding within its 1982-83 FCSS allocation to cover the cost of administering the program.
- That the city assist the province in insuring that the after school care program is cost shared with the federal government under the terms of the Canada Assistance Plan.

#### 4. Regulations and Guidelines Governing the After School Care Program

4.1 Because of the recent return of the after school care program to the city, it was decided to seek the opinions of staff, board members, and parents on the type of regulations and guidelines that they would prefer to see governing the program. With some exceptions, there was general support among all three groups for the standards that the city had previously established. Along with the recommended change in the staff/child ratio (see 3.3), the other suggested alteration in the regulations concerned the number of square feet of playroom space per child that centres were required to provide. It was felt that 40 square feet per child, rather than 50 square feet per child, would be quite adequate; with the result that Centres now limited by size to 25 children could increase their intake to at least 30 children without lowering the quality of their programming.

4.2 As mentioned above, the province requires the city to make funding available to all After School Care Centres, including private commercial operations. During the interviews concern was frequently expressed that while the commercial centres could receive funding they were not required to meet the standards set by the city for non-profit centres. The opinion of those who expressed their concern was that all centres, non-profit and commercial, should be obligated to provide the same quality of service and meet the same regulations and guidelines if they are to receive any form of funding from the city. It was also suggested that commercial centres should be required to:

- a) set up an Advisory Board from among the parents whose children are attending the Centre,
- b) notify the city of the names and addresses of all Advisory Board members and any subsequent changes,
- c) provide the city with a list of all staff members, along with their qualifications and job responsibilities, and
- d) submit annually to the city an audited financial statement.

4.3 The majority of the After School Care Centre staff who were interviewed expressed a need for more support services from the city administration. For example, it was suggested that inservice training for after school care staff should be available on a reasonably regular basis. Concern was also voiced that centre staff were frequently unaware of other community services that could perhaps be of assistance to some of the families that they were in touch with. As well, some of the staff mentioned that they were uncertain as to where they could turn for special assistance if one of their children or families was having a particularly difficult time.

4.4 Many board members agreed that additional support services would be of considerable benefit to the Centres. especially as it would allow Directors more time to be concerned with programming. It was also mentioned that training seminars or workshops on board duties and responsibilities were a further support service that would be of considerable assistance.

4.5 Parents were also interested in the question of support services Interest was expressed in courses or workshops on such topics as single parenting, parenting skills, and coping with divorce. As well a number of parents indicated that they would appreciate having an opportunity to meet with a social worker on issues other than the size of their monthly subsidy.

4.6 All of these concerns recommend that the city should provide these support services to all After School Care Centres through a small staff of social workers located in the existing Social Service unit offices. The responsibilities of these social workers should include:

- a) being available for consultation with the parents of children attending the Centres.
- b) administering the income related subsidy program.
- c) evaluating applications for annual capital or equipment grants.
- d) identifying the training needs of staff members and the Board of Directors and providing, or contracting for, the necessary workshops or seminars.
- e) providing information to staff and parents on existing community services, and offering workshops or seminars on topics of interest to parents.
- f) assisting the centre staff and board to meet and maintain the City of Edmonton standards established for the after school care program.

### Recommendations

- That the number of square feet of playroom space per child be reduced to 40 square feet.
- That all non-profit or commercial After School Care Centres receiving financial support should be required to meet the same regulations and programming standards.
- That all commercial After School Care Centres be required to establish an Advisory Board.
- That the city provide appropriate support services to all After School Care Centres.

### Conclusion

A universal concern that was expressed throughout the interviews with staff, board members, and parents was the need to remove, as quickly as possible, the disturbing uncertainty about the future of the after school care program. Along with the significant number of staff resignations that have resulted from this uncertainty, non-profit Centres have been unable to give parents any assurance that the after school care program will be available in 1982. To many low income or single parent families the indecision about the future of the program is an additional burden that they should not be required to carry.

Commendably the staff and board members of the Centres showed a willingness to consider making adjustments in their budgeting and programming, particularly if it meant that the future of after school care could be assured. As the recommendations of this report suggest, it is also critical that the city continue its negotiations with the province over the future funding of the program. While it is appreciated that differences of opinion presently exist between the city and the province over the requirements for a quality after school care program a satisfactory compromise must be arrived at if the future of this very necessary community service is to be maintained.