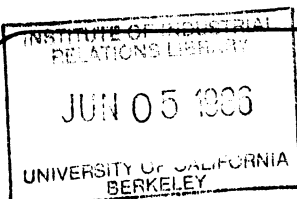


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DAYCARE AT THE WORKPLACE

by Mary King

Only 2,000 corporations, or one out of every 3,000 employers provided any form of childcare assistance to their employees in 1985.

The need for daycare at the workplace first became a public issue in this country during World War II, when working women entered the war industries. At the West Coast Air Production Council put it at the time, "lack of twenty-five child care centers can cost ten bombers a month," due to absenteeism of working mothers. Conflict within the Roosevelt administration, over the proper role of both mothers and the government, crippled the federal daycare program. At the program's peak, only 66,000 children--less than ten percent of children needing care--were enrolled in federally supported facilities.

Daycare at the workplace is not much better now, although the need for it has grown. In 1984, 61% of mothers with children under 18 were working for pay, including a full 52% of mothers with children under age six. The biggest group of children in childcare are in "family daycare," care by providers who take six to 12 children into their homes. Parents split the care of another one-fifth of children, often by working different shifts. The remainder of children attend daycare centers, before and after school programs, or are minded by people who come into the children's homes.

Since most childcare arrangements depend on one or two people, they are very vulnerable to disruption. Working parents first must find care which they are happy with and can afford. Although daycare workers are paid very low wages, daycare can assume a large role in working parents' budgets, averaging about \$300 a month for one child in full-time care. Later, parents must cope with abrupt stoppages of childcare when providers become ill, change jobs, or appear unsatisfactory. Back-up care is not usually available when children are ill and can't attend their regular daycare.

Although parents often need to hide their daycare problems at work, both employers and employees suffer losses due to employees' absenteeism, lost concentration, frequent lateness, inability to change schedules or to work overtime, and inability to attend after-hours meetings.

What Are Unions Doing? -- Union leadership has often been remote from the childcare concerns of union members. They are mostly men, of an age and lifestyle that usually allowed them to avoid childcare problems. As of 1984, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU) were the only union to provide childcare through private sector collective bargaining.

However, in 1983, the AFL-CIO adopted a resolution calling on national and international unions to "emphasize the importance of childcare as a vitally important bargaining issue."

And some unions are. For instance, the California State Employees Association (CSEA) has negotiated childcare benefits since its 1982 contract. CSEA's 1984-85 contract established a \$1 million fund, to be loaned to non-profit, state-run childcare centers to cover start-up costs. Further CCSEA would like to see the state provide childcare centers with space in state buildings at low rent, with low-cost insurance, with in-kind donations of maintenance and utilities, and provide for parental power in center decision-making.

Union efforts to assist members with childcare may be best made in conjunction with other local unions or agencies, as is demonstrated by the experience of ACTWU, which operated six of its own childcare centers at the peak of union involvement. As Don Shearer, ACTWU's childcare director in the Baltimore region put it, "unless the industry is a strong industry, and has a large number of employees in the area, ... [opening a union childcare center] is a risk...you can end up...with empty buildings."

An example of a successful joint effort is the Orchard School Afterschool Program, operated by Service Employees International Union (SIEU) Local 715 in San Jose. Their program resulted from four way cooperation among the union, the employer, the YMCA and the school district.

In San Mateo County, members of different unions got together to explore childcare options for San Francisco airport workers. The San Francisco Airport Labor Coalition is now opening a childcare center near the airport for the children of the members of all the unions at work at the airport.

Louise Rush, Corporate Childcare Consultant at the Children's Council of San Francisco, also advocates joint union efforts in these hard economic times. She is currently meeting regularly with representatives of several San Francisco unions in an attempt to create a group childcare strategy. Possibilities include union-sponsored information and referral services, reserving spaces in existing childcare facilities for children of union members, and encouraging employers to set up tax-deferred childcare accounts for employees. These accounts are somewhat similar to IRAs; they allow parents not to pay tax on income spent for childcare.

Other possible tactics for unions include both pushing employers to take greater responsibility for workers' childcare, and old-fashioned self-help such as drawing on retired union members and their families for short-term childcare, care for sick children and infant care.

What About The Corporations? -- A 1982 study by the National Employer Supported Childcare Project reported that 95% of companies subsidizing childcare considered that the benefits to the company outweighed the costs. Further, since passage of the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, companies need not pay taxes on profits used to support childcare. Gordon McGovern, chief executive at Campbell Soup, told a *New York Times* reporter that underwriting the fees at the company childcare center "is a dollars and cents issue for us; it's part of running a business well."

Why Don't More Companies Support Childcare? -- Often management is unaware of childcare problems of employees. If union officials are removed from childcare concerns, executives are even more remote from the problems experienced by working parents. Provision of childcare information and referral services, now available to employees at Lockheed in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz, hinged on the timely conversation of Lockheed's president with his working daughter, according to Jennifer King, of Choices for Children in Sunnyvale.

Even when aware of childcare problems, employers are, of course, concerned about the potential costs of providing childcare assistance. Others are dubious about the equity of offering a service which benefits only some employees. Many more are uninformed about productivity losses due to problematic childcare arrangements, about the stress childcare arrangements create in employees' lives, about the tax benefits of providing childcare assistance, and about the wide range of options open to corporations interested in offering some form of support for childcare.

What Can Corporations Do? -- Corporate support for childcare can take several forms. Minimal programs consist of on-site parenting seminars. Companies may fund resource and referral services to local daycare providers, or arrange transportation for older children from school to daycare. Other possibilities are subsidizing and publicizing after school programs, and making in-kind donations to local childcare centers patronized by employees. Vender/voucher programs involve giving vouchers either to parents or directly to daycare providers to pay for either full-time or sick-child care. Finally, employers may operate an on-site daycare center, or join with other nearby companies in supporting an off-site center convenient to all of them.

For The Future -- Daycare at the workplace has traditionally been offered by employers as a recruiting tool. Hospitals developed the first and best workplace daycare facilities, in hopes of retaining skilled nurses on shift work. Bay Area high-tech companies provide childcare services to attract workers in boom times. Given the potentially wide support of working parents, perhaps unions should adopt daycare provision as a recruiting tool of their own.

-- Mary King

The Coalition for Labor Union Women (CLUW) has recently published a handbook for unions interested in childcare, titled *Bargaining for Childcare: Contract Language for Union Parents*. It is 64 pages long, contains actual and model contract language, and is available from CLUW at 15 Union Square, New York NY 10003 for \$5.00 a copy. (Price are lower for large orders).

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