



## Teachers Learn, Children Benefit

Can Extension play a role in upgrading child care services in Virginia? A pilot project, sponsored by the 1890s program at Virginia State College, was conducted in the Roanoke Valley to answer this question. It was revealed that Extension resources and services can be used successfully to improve the day care programs offered to children, especially in states where licensing standards are minimal. In-service training workshops were conducted for child day care personnel in an effort to provide quality rather than merely custodial care to children.

### *Extension Project*

The project to upgrade child care services was developed according to the traditional Extension model for adult education. The need for enriching child care services in the area was identified and methods for meeting the needs were determined.

Although the project was designed to benefit children in day care, the target audiences were day care personnel, parents, and the public. In the long run, children benefit more if the public is aware of the needs of children in day care.

As in all Extension activities, the project depended on requests for help. So, the success of the project depended on the acceptance by day care personnel of the program director as a person who could help them meet their needs for continuing education and on their requests for workshops.

The director's first task was to become personally acquainted with day care personnel and to acquaint them with child development services available through the project. It was also necessary to inform the community about the program. The local newspapers and TV stations cooperated in describing the program and introducing the director to the community.

### *Workshops*

Conducting in-service workshops was the most effective way to improve child care services in the valley. Staffs from several neighboring centers joined the workshops when possible, which were usually held on the premises of one of the centers during the children's nap time—from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Workshop sessions were informal. The small group format provided opportunities for participants to ask questions and share experiences. Participants became *involved* in the sessions. If education is defined as changed behavior, such involvement of workshop participants was necessary to bring about changed behavior and, consequently, improved programs for children. Another outcome of the workshops was the participants' improved morale and images of their jobs.

Various teaching techniques were used in the workshops—films, handouts, demonstrations, discussions, and laboratory experiences. Subject matter for the workshops varied according to the needs expressed by day care personnel.

A Community Resources Symposium was held to inform day care personnel

about resources available to children with problems. A film festival was arranged to acquaint day care personnel with films available for in-service workshops.

### *Problems*

Many problems exist when you try to upgrade child care services. For example, workshops needed to be held during the working day rather than at night or on Saturday. But, it's difficult for child care personnel to get away from their jobs during the working day.

This problem was solved in one center by holding workshops in the room where the older children were resting. At another center, volunteers stayed with the children during nap time while the teachers attended the workshops in another room in the center. In larger centers, workshops were held in split sessions—half the staff attending a workshop one day and the other half attending a duplicate one the next day.

### *Implications for Extension*

Extension agents can establish groups of day care directors, who can meet regularly—monthly or quarterly, as desired by the members. In many communities, no organization for day care directors exists. The meetings would give them an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences as well as gain information from programs presented at the meetings. Agents could call on Extension specialists and resource people in the community to help with programs for day care personnel.

Extension agents can share with day care personnel their expertise in nutrition, menu planning, budgeting, space use, relationships, and planning outdoor space. They can include day care personnel on their mailing lists for newsletters about children and their needs.

Extension specialists in the area of child development can develop materials to be used in in-service training sessions for day care personnel. The specialists can

serve as resource people, with knowledge about available publications and films.

As Extension expands its programs into urban areas and as it seeks to reach new audiences, such as young urban families, meeting the educational needs of day care workers has a definite place in Extension planning. By working with day care personnel to help them offer developmental and educational programs to young children, Extension can improve the quality of life for young children today and help give them a good start toward becoming tomorrow's adults.

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