

East side
(KG in CA)

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY CHILDCARE CENTER PARENTS GROUP

December 10, 1979.

Parent Concern About the Center

Attached to this face-sheet are the results of a recent survey of issues that are currently of concern to parents about the Center. At a meeting held recently, attended by parents from 10 families, it was very clear that there has been a growing concern among parents about three areas of problems:

- 1) The relations between the Center staff and parents.
- 2) A lack of adequate information about the Center's staff, organization, facilities and resources.
- 3) A lack of information about the Center's policies on childcare, child development, and programs of activity.

While the survey was conducted to systematically probe the extent of concern and establish the specific issues that parents feel are problematic, it needs to be made clear that the primary motivation and intention of parents is constructive;

To identify and resolve the present problems by increasing the level of communication and understanding between parents and staff about the children's needs. This should contribute to an improvement in the quality of childcare and child development both in the Center and in the home.

With this goal in mind parents have met to discuss mutual concerns and want to meet with the staff to raise these issues and work with the staff to find ways of resolving them.

Because the report deals primarily with aspects of the Center that are seen to be causing problems, parents feel it is important to make clear and explicit the many things about the Center that are strongly valued. Indeed, as was made clear by all parents at the first meeting, these are the major reasons why parents choose to have their children enrolled in the Center in the first place.

Aspects of the Center that are Strongly Valued by Parents:

- That the Center is small in terms of the overall number of children, and that there is a mixed age, sex and ethnic composition among the children.
- That there are both sexes on the staff.
- That there is a concern among staff to base childcare and children's activities upon sound child development theory.
- That the development theme of fostering the individual child's independence and self reliance is balanced with the theme of social skills of cooperation and role development.
- Specific activities that are highly valued by parents are:
 - artistic projects
 - group music and dance activities
 - nature studies
 - sex and body education
 - field trips
 - outdoor activities (especially getting the children outside in the winter).

- That there is a high concern for the child's health, as exemplified in:
strict rules about health and illness
nutritious snacks
- That there have been continuous improvements in the physical facilities, e.g.
the infant-toddler room, refurbished kitchen, etc.

A Meeting Between All Center Staff and All Parents

To facilitate the discussion and resolution of the problems, parents feel that it is important that a meeting is held between the Center staff and parents as soon as possible. Because of the extent of concern among parents and the fundamental need for greatly improved communication, it is essential that the first meeting should involve everyone; that is, all staff and all parents. This will help to ensure that as many aspects and viewpoints on the problems are brought to light as possible. With this objective in mind parents want a meeting to be organized as soon as possible in the New Year. A suggested date is: January 3rd, 1980 at 6:30 p.m. Details on the final arrangements for a meeting place and time will be circulated when finalized.

Topics Parents Want Discussed at the Meeting

Based on the result of the survey (see the attached report) parents would like to discuss the following topics:

1. The need for improving the relations and communication between the Center Staff and parents through:
 - a) Scheduled conferences every 3 months between individual parents and staff about the child's developmental progress.
 - b) Short weekly debriefing meetings between a staff member and parents overiewing the child's week.
 - c) Regular monthly meetings between all parents and staff to resolve any current problems and to increase the communication over child development policies and programs.
2. The need for more information on the staff and organization of the Center:
 - a) More information on names, qualifications, positions and responsibilities for all Center staff.
 - b) Details on the hierarchy of responsibility.
 - c) Details on the specific procedure for the discussion of problems/ complaints and to whom these should be addressed.
 - d) More information about the Board of Directors.
 - e) Parent representation on the Board of Directors.
 - f) Details on the connection between the Center and the 12th Ave People's Coop.
 - g) Details about the specific criteria for selection and admission of new children.

3. Clarification of the Center's priorities in its policies on childcare, child development, and activity programs.
 - a) Details and rationale for Center's expectations of the children.
 - b) Need for greater flexibility in Center's implementation of policies over toilet training, speech development, sleeping in a crib, etc.
 - c) Details and rationale for the new policy of dividing children into age groups.

Results of Recent Survey of Issues of Concern to Parents (December 4, 1979).

A meeting of parents of the Eastside Community Childcare Center was held recently to discuss a number of issues over which there has been a growing concern among parents, in response to the recent changes and reorganization implemented by the Center. A good indication of the extent of concern existing among parents was demonstrated by the strong attendance of 13 parents, representing 10 different families, at the meeting. Following a lively and quite thorough discussion of the numerous issues that parents brought to the meeting, a list of the major issues was prepared and circulated to all parents to get a more systematic assessment of the priority of specific problems and to get more details on parents' feelings about the issues.

Of the 14 questionnaires distributed (one to each family) 10 have so far been returned. What follows is a simple tabulation of the answers from the 10 families for each question in terms of whether parents felt the issue was "very important", "important", or "not important" as a matter that should be discussed with the Center. Since the comments are especially revealing of parents' feelings about the issues, a sample of these has been included as well.

The original order of the questions has been reorganized into three more general themes of concern expressed by the parents:

1. The need for closer and more coordinated relations between the Center and the parents.
2. A desire for more information on the organization and staff of the Center.
3. Greater clarification of Eastside's priorities in its policies on childcare, child development, and related activity programs.

1. The Need for Closer and More Coordinated Relations Between the Center and Parents.

Of the three larger areas of concern, relations between the Center staff and parents is the one about which parents are most concerned. Without exception all 10 families feel that it is "very important" that "there is more coordination between home and the center in regard to the child's progression through the major development stages, and continuity in the way parents and staff relate to the children on basic issues". The feelings over this among parents are especially strong, as can be seen in their comments:

"If the staff could spend less time thinking about child development theories and more time thinking about children, less time "communicating" with parents and more time talking with them, coordination could result."

"To me this (coordination between home and center) is primary because I want to work in conjunction - to have similar activities at home."

"Need to have some way for parents and staff to get together. Not sure if this needs to be weekly or what, but do need an ongoing dialogue."

"I really do think the Center has been lax in keeping parents up to date with what's going on in terms of the care for kids, policy making, and staff reorganization."

At the moment there are strong feelings of suspicion and distrust about the Center among parents:

"The secrecy and evasion on the part of certain staff members have created a situation in which the parents and children are being manipulated by the staff."

"I'm frustrated at the sudden hush-hush of changing policies in dealing with day-to-day activities, etc. At this point, I am in favor of anything that will confront these problems and bring them to the attention of the staff."

Responses to a number of suggestions made at the meeting to deal with the problem of improving the coordination and communication between the staff and parents were as follows:

	<u>Very Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>
Scheduled conferences every 3 months for individual parents and staff	80%	20%	0
Short weekly debriefing meeting over-viewing the child's week with staff	60%	30%	10%
Regular monthly meetings between all parents and staff	80%	20%	0

2. A Desire for More Information on the Organization and Staff of the Center

There are five issues that parents are concerned about here.

	<u>Very Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>
i) More information on names, qualifications, positions and roles for all Center staff. Details on the hierarchy of responsibility	80%	20%	0

The comments by individual parents make it clear that the concern about the staff's qualifications is primarily in terms of their skill in relating to the children.

"I expect any staff dealing with the kids to be both open to the needs of parents and have a positive attitude in dealing with the kids."

Strong concern was expressed over the role of supervisor:

"I think the supervisor needs to be direct with parents, and if there are problems in relating to parents these should be dealt with frankly."

Criticism was made about "evasiveness and secrecy " in dealing with parents. And there is a suggestion of the need for a greater "responsiveness" and "responsibility" to parents.

Concern was also voiced that the result of the "frequent staff turnover" could mean that children became reluctant to form close relationships with individual members of the staff.

	<u>Very Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>
ii) More information on the Board of Directors (composition, how elected, accountability etc.) and on Center facilities, resources & revenue - especially income, expenditures and priorities	60%	20%	20%
iii) The election of parent representatives to serve on the Board of Directors	70%	30%	0

Aside from wanting information about the Board of Directors, the more important concern is

"parents having some way or form that we can be regularly heard by the decision making body at the Center."

This would not only ensure that parents have a voice in basic policy decisions and changes, but would also open up more of a dialogue between the Center and parents over areas of mutual concern and promote greater understanding and cooperation when policy is implemented.

iv) Details on the connection between the Center and the 12th Ave Peoples' Coop.

70% of the families wanted more information about this - especially about the fee deductions that some parents are currently getting from the Center for their voluntary work in the Coop. Concern was also expressed about the politics of the Coop and the Center's role in either supporting or lending credence to any political stance or activities.

v) More information on the criteria for the selection and admission of new children to the Center.

"important"

90% of the families felt more information on this was "very important" or/ Among the comments "strong concern" was voiced about the "disturbing" possibility

that elements of "racial discrimination" may be involved in the present admission procedures.

3. Greater Clarification of the Center's Priorities in its Policies on Childcare, Child Development, and Related Activity Programs.

With respect to the Center's policies and programs on childcare and child development three aspects were of concern to parents.

i) 9 of the 10 families who returned questionnaires, felt that the Center's expectations of the children were too high:

"Some order is necessary, but children shouldn't be expected to be little adults."

They also felt that flexibility is sacrificed for order in dealing with the children:

"Why is it necessary to assign a place for each child to sit at breakfast, rather than letting them sit where they like?"

ii) 70% felt that there was too much rigidity with the Center in applying its theories over such things as sleeping in a crib, toilet training, etc. On this there was a variety of opinions:

"I want to know and learn the child development theories the staff is using, and in particular the activities used to put this into effect."

"Do the staff think of children as individuals with individual and different needs?"

"More RESPONSIVE communication between parents and staff is needed. Perhaps parental permission would be appropriate before the staff begins any specific intensive program with a child."

"Let's discuss 'the scientific standardization process of child development' at one of the parent/staff meetings. I was not aware that the process of child development was either scientific or standardized."

iii) All parents wanted to know more about the new policy of breaking children up into age groups.

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