

FAMILY DAY CARE

Family Day Care is a programme where up to four children are cared for during the day in the homes of selected housewives who have a genuine liking and are interested in looking after their children. It seeks to use the skills which such people may have already acquired in the selection of ordinary homes where a friendly and comfortable setting may be provided for children whose parents are working or need support for mothers at home. The organising agency eg. municipal council, parent committee, or welfare organisation such as the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, assumes responsibility for the selection of homes to be used and for the placing of children where it is considered they would be the most likely to benefit. It also undertakes to follow the placements of the children through visiting the F.D.C. homes and by keeping in touch with the parents who are using the service.

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence has a traditional concern with experimental ventures and social welfare programmes, particularly in relation to the problems of the low income families; housing and basic income maintenance and the effects of these conditions on families.

They were particularly concerned when the Housing Commission planned and then built the four 20 storey blocks in high-rise flats on the Atherton Gardens opposite the Brotherhood's Central Office in Fitzroy. They were aware of the great need for day care facilities being exaggerated when instead of 600 people living in the one area there would be over 4,000 with approximately 700 children 5 years old and under.

In 1971, Barbara Spalding was appointed the Social Planning Officer with the Brotherhood and after recommendations and much planning F.D.C. commenced in September, 1971 with the support of 4 Trust Funds. This was initially to be a 3 years pilot demonstration project, to see if this method of day care for children was feasible, worthwhile and wanted, not only by the parents of children who needed the care, but could also offer good quality care. Since 1975 approved F.D.C. programmes have received funding through the Federal Government.

The suburb of Fitzroy, in which our programme operates, is a high density, low income, multi-lingual inner suburb where there is a high degree of mobility and

financial vulnerability. Here, day care is still an urgent necessity for most families and the need for the parents to work generally stems from economic and not social reasons.

F.D.C. programmes are now throughout Australia and each one has developed in a slightly different way, adapting and fitting into the needs of the local community.

In Victoria, F.D.C. programmes which have commenced are in:

BALLARAT
BROADMEADOWS
CARLTON
CAULFIELD
COBURG
COLLINGWOOD
CORIO
DANDENONG
DIAMOND VALLEY
ELTHAM
DONCASTER/TEMPLESTOWE
FITZROY
FLEMINGTON*
NUNAWADING
HAMILTON
KEW*
KNOX
MELTON
SPRINGVALE
ST. KILDA
WARRNAMBOOL
WILLIAMSTOWN

* denotes those programmes not receiving Federal funding.

F.D.C. is essentially a flexible programme and can offer full time care five days a week from as early as 6 a.m. until late into the evening. Many parents work hours which do not co-incide with local day nursery hours, such as shift workers in factories, hospitals and transport departments. Also, children may only need care between parents shifts eg. mother working 7.30 — 3.30 and the father from 3.00 — 11.00 p.m. and so the need is just for one and a half hours care while the parents are travelling to and from work. Occasionally,

children may be able to stay overnight with their childminder if the parents job demands infrequent night shift, or perhaps the necessity of an out of town in interstate trip and there is no alternative or family support. Weekend care is also available in F.D.C. programmes. Some children have been placed in F.D.C. while a parent is in hospital and the father can take the children home after work. Other children are referred to F.D.C. because the mother feels she cannot cope with building pressures surrounding her. It is very important that the service offered fits into each locality's need and can offer part day care, occasional and emergency care as well as full time care. Unfortunately, the funding from Federal Government, which I will discuss later, is geared for full time children only.

STAFF

The Co-ordinators of F.D.C. programmes have a wide variety of backgrounds and generally have been involved in some form of child development training experience. They work either full or part time in the different programmes. Many schemes have a Secretary/Receptionist or access to one, which is very important for the parents, childminder and those inquiring to be in direct contact with F.D.C. office.

The Accounting Department of the sponsoring organisation is generally available for support and the financial side of the programme. In some schemes, a Child Development Officer, who has usually a Kindergarten training or Mothercraft Nurse background, works with the Co-ordinator, by taking regular play sessions in the Childminders homes, using activities geared to the childrens stages of development and discussing with her the areas of concern and the childrens' progress.

The co-ordinator's task is in the selection of the women who want to become part of the programme as childminders, and in assessing the need of the parents, and children requiring day care; placing them in the most beneficial home for them. Many times parents may be advised to re-think their priorities and an alternative form is worked out which may be more suitable for herself and children. Sometimes parents have previously had a bad experience with a private minder and another form of day care may be more suitable for her and the child; this is followed through. Close links with local day nurseries, private childminding centres, are important.

CHILDMINDERS

The women who wish to care for other peoples children have the one common feature — they have experienced caring for and bringing up their own children. Applicants have a variety of reasons for preferring to be at home. Sometimes they have a pre-schooler and want a companion for their child, others have a longing for

another younger child in their home as their youngest becomes less demanding and/or starts school.

They are generally, warm sensitive, loving women, who have room for one, two, three or maybe four more. We have been interested in finding that those who appear most adaptable and aware to the needs of the children in care are those with larger families (4-9) and usually they themselves are from large families (5-16). The demand for care and the demand to be a childminder in Fitzroy, swings according to the economic and employment situation. Sometimes parents of children receiving day care may lose their insecure jobs and be asking to be childminders the following week. Whereas in other areas, there seems to be a more definite line between parents and childminders.

Applicants are generally referred by word of mouth, from friends and neighbours, Infant Welfare Sisters, Kindergarten Teachers etc. They are seen initially for an office interview and then this is followed by a home visit, to see the applicant in her own setting and observing her attitude and behaviour with her own and neighbours children. Often a Co-ordinator will go back two, three or more times getting to know the childminder and assessing her suitability, her attitudes to feeding routines, toileting etc. Her general child caring feelings (taking children to kindergarten, child behaviour patterns etc) are discussed informally over a cup of tea.

We have learnt that one of the first and the most important questions to be asked, is the attitude of the childminders' husband and family to her commencing working with children at home and the support she will receive from them. It is interesting that this has not only been found here in Melbourne to be important but Co-ordinators of F.D.C. programmes in East London, South Africa and older programmes in Ballerup, Denmark, have agreed it is one of their first questions asked when interviewing applicants.

Parents are referred to F.D.C. through referrals from Social Workers in the local municipality, local hospitals, home help supervisors, Infant Welfare Sisters and Kindergarten Teachers, primary school staff, advertising and the neighbourhood grapevine. Some families are referred by the local day nurseries and private childminding centres with the request for F.D.C. placement until a vacancy is available. It is interesting to see the number of parents who prefer to leave their children with the F.D.C. childminder when the original placement at the nursery becomes available.

There is also a growing number of self-referrals from those asking specifically for F.D.C., especially to those children under 2 years where a small home setting with warm motherly care is ideal for following the needs of their own child.

Another advantage of F.D.C. is the possibility of brothers and sisters being cared for together, with the older children being taken to and collected from school and all being together in the school holiday periods.

One of the main criticisms of F.D.C. is the instability of the placements i.e. frequent changeover of childminders. We have just not found this to be the rule; we have children who have been with their minder as toddlers, taken to kindergarten and then on to school.

Parents are able generally, to be more involved with their own child's development and upbringing in F.D.C. homes than they would be if the child attended a creche. They share the child's experiences with the childminder and together they work out their programme. The mother is able to say when and how much sleep she would like the child to have; they can discuss the commencement of toilet training, new foods and so many other vital areas that are important to the working mother. Sometimes the parents prefer to bring their own food for the child; others prefer to have the childminder cook a meal. We have found this particularly valuable for our migrant families who can send their own specialised foods and then the child does not have to adjust immediately to a strange situation as well as a strange taste in food.

Being a close neighbourhood setting, F.D.C. homes are generally similar to those from which the children have come. This is valuable for the child in adjusting to his mother going to work. The majority of F.D.C. homes are within walking distance, so the family does not have transport problems. We also have a small group of children who travel quite long distances to F.D.C. homes in Fitzroy: this is either because the family has moved from the area and still wants to continue with the same childminder or there is no suitable day care in their home area.

Firm friendships between parents and childminders often develop from the caring and sharing in the growth of the children in care. Often the parents appreciate the interest of an "extended family" particularly if their own family supports are lacking or are inaccessible e.g. interstate or overseas.

Older childminders help the young mother with their experience of bringing up their own children and her reassurance is valued especially with help in knowing whether it is "just teething" or something more serious, in which case the doctor is called. Childminders sometimes go shopping with the migrant mothers, pointing out foods that are suitable for their child's needs or just for an outing together.

In our scheme, we have at present Australian childminders and also those who have come from Egypt, Malta, Italy, Ecuador, England and children in care having families who came from Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Comumbia, U.K., Uruguay and Australia.

Our programme has been operating now for 5 years 10 months (July '77). Childminders currently working with us have been involved in our F.D.C. for an average of 3 years 9 months. The shortest length of stay at present is 6 months and the longest period is 5 years 8 months.

F.D.C. programmes work as a link with the local community resources and especially with Infant Welfare Centres, Kindergartens and schools. Childminders take their children in care regularly to be weighed and for their immunizations. Children over three and a half years are enrolled into local kindergartens and taken by the childminder. It is important that they do not miss out on this valuable experience because their own mothers are unable to take them.

Similar experiences which the children would normally have at home if their mothers were not working are part of the day with the childminder e.g. helping to make the beds, exploring kitchen cupboards, shopping, visiting nearby parks and gardens, going to the library etc.

F.D.C. programmes, depending on their financial resources and "scrounging abilities" have developed equipment libraries for their childminders and in some cases parents who want to borrow for example, folding cots, pushers, prams, car seats etc. Toy and Book Libraries are another support for both the childminders and parents who are able to borrow on a regular basis. Our lending library has also developed into a "swap" centre where the parents and childminders can bring out-grown clothes and toys and exchange them for others. From this has developed parents collecting waste materials from their places of work which are always appreciated and often are suitable for further play ideas and collage.

PAYMENT

In F.D.C. programmes, the childminders receive between \$20.00 — \$25.00 per child for full time care. Payment to childminders is on a regular basis either through the organisation or directly from the parents.

Some schemes have the policy of paying for "services rendered" and the childminder fills in her own time sheets and returns it to the council and her cheque is later sent out to her.

In our programme, parents pay through our office. We and the childminders recognise that theirs is a job and so they are paid on a weekly basis. They are also paid for all Public Holidays and parents are encouraged

to pay for children's absences e.g. sickness and holiday leave etc. Parents who pay regularly to the sponsoring organisation have often mentioned that they prefer this arrangement because they do not need to worry if the childminder is wondering if the parents can or will pay her at the end of the week and vice versa.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Approved F.D.C. schemes receive funding from the Federal Government under the Childhood Services Programme. On January 1st, 1977 the funding was increased. There are three grants available.

- (1) an ongoing operational Assistance Grant towards administration costs and support services.
- (2) an ongoing special-need supplement grant to help low income families meet the cost of necessary child care services for their children.
- (3) grants towards equipment requirements of the scheme.

After the first year of operation, the operational assistance grant is to be a guaranteed minimum level of support of \$15,000.00 provided that the average attendance figures are maintained at a level not less than 35 equivalent full time children in care in the scheme; an additional \$7.00 per week per child over the first 35 children.

The number of children in care is calculated on the basis of the actual hours of attendance on a representative average day in each quarter.

The special-needs supplement allows sponsoring organizations to help low income families with the cost of fees for necessary child care.

Each sponsoring organization determines the basis it uses in assessing a family's eligibility for subsidy — with approval from the Office of Child Care.

We congratulate the Office of Child Care for being aware of the different needs of the area and individual family needs and allowing the basis to vary with each scheme and the recognition of the fact that each scheme does indeed have differing needs. Although there is no upper limit for subsidy, the grant available to each scheme is up to \$7.00 per week for each equivalent full time child.

An equipment grant of \$2,000.00 may be made at the commencement of the scheme. The difficulty many schemes have found has been the expectation to spend this within the first year. This is not so easy as the needs vary as the scheme expands.

As previously mentioned, each scheme has and is developed to fit in to meet the local community's needs and it is important value F.D.C. can offer in return, by not just being involved in matching children and childminders but meeting children's and family's needs.

In Nunawading for example, the Co-ordinator has been working with a group who are concerned about the lack of after school activities and school holiday programmes.

In Broadmeadows, in the newly established housing areas, playgrounds are being started and organized by the F.D.C. Co-ordinator. It is of positive value to a F.D.C. programme to work in with a Group Care Centre, where the parents and children's needs can be more realistically assessed and met.

In Dandenong the F.D.C. scheme works from the Day Nursery.

In Knox there are 2 small Group Care homes caring for approximately 20 children and in Fitzroy we also have a small Group Care Centre called LIMURRU COTTAGE. This centre offers full and part time care, and part day care and has emergency places kept for F.D.C. childminders if the necessity arises, and there are varied reasons the centre is used by the F.D.C. childminders; sometimes for just half an hour if it is raining and the children are there while the childminder has a doctor's appointment or on rare occasions, when the childminder is sick or if the childminder is away on holidays.

The staff at LIMURRU COTTAGE work together with F.D.C. programme, and support some minders e.g. taking one child to and from kindergarten, to speech therapy sessions and interpreting for Arabic, Greek, Italian and Spanish speaking families.

Some schemes have found regular monthly meetings with childminders and parents have been valuable especially in Knox and Warrnambool. Newsletters are also a good source for keeping the childminders informed and passing on new ideas about children, activities to make and do, and general information about resources in the areas. It has been found that a single page newsheet has been more successful than a magazine type for childminders have more opportunity of reading everything on one page rather than setting it aside to read later.

What about future developments for F.D.C. Programmes?

As Co-ordinators and Child Development Officers come together and meet regularly in the F.D.C. Association, we hope the childminders with the co-ordinators help, will become a vocal voice in the community and form perhaps an association to protect their rights. In the U.S. at Pacific Oaks College, the childminders have formed WATCH — Women Attentive to Children's Happiness, through which they are becoming more aware of their rights.

Training sessions or projects similar to that recently undertaken in Ramsay County, Minnesota with about 920 licenced F.D.C. childminders perhaps could be provided. Training options included credited course work

through the University of Minnesota, presented on television and radio. Neighbourhood discussion groups, formal classes, courses and training seminars sponsored by the area vocational and technical schools and the University of Minnesota workshops on special topics and field trips were also offered.

In the U.K. in January 1977, the B.B.C. presented a television series of 19 programmes called "Other People's Children". This excellent series was shown 3 times during each week so that most people had an opportunity to see and discuss the problems and joys of being involved in childminding.

The Victorian F.D.C. Association is hoping that programme will be made available for Australian television viewing and the hand book also entitled "Other People's Children", which was given free to all registered childminders will be obtainable in Australia shortly.

Finally, I would like to state that we are aware that Parents are concerned about their children in day care and discussing their children's development and behaviour and progress is important.

In our scheme, for example the office is open daily and parents are encourage to come in and discuss any concerns or fears particularly regarding the day care experience. The office is open later on Friday nights for the benefit of the parents. Childminders are visited in all schemes on a regular basis, some more than others depending on their need.

The accessibility of our F.D.C. office which is approximately 5-10 minutes walking from the majority of families involved in the programme is an advantage.

In each F.D.C. home the daily routine is regulated to the needs of those children in care, e.g. children with a medical problem may need more opportunities for rest and sleep. Some toddlers and babies prefer a sleep in the morning, others later in the afternoon. This is not possible in a group care centre where the larger number of children and staff are involved and sleeptime is a general one after lunch to enable the staff to have their break during the day.

Sibylle Escalona, in an article about developmental needs of children under two and a half years at the U.S. Conference in 1966 discussed the difference of a well run group care situation where those in charge of the children are fully aware of the needs and have great understanding of the children in their care . . . but in these centres "someone else does the laundry" "someone else does the cooking" "someone else does the budgeting" "someone else comes to their assistance for the maintenance of the Centre".

There is quite a difference in an ordinary family home. There is bathing, sleeptime, playing with the baby and children time; all these are timed against the necessity of having meals cooked, washing done and

shopping. The child is learning about the outside work world and the pressures it makes on his family. He learns to be silent while his mother answers the phone and so on. As Sibylle said "In a family a child's life is not so egocentrically structured". Anna Freud added referring to residential institution (but I still feel it is relevant to our discussion) — "Normally the child is an addition to the adults world but in a residential institution the adult is the addition to the child's world" I feel this is an other advantage F.D.C. can offer to those children in care. F.D.C. minders are also in a position to gauge emotional, intellectual and social deficits.

A survey in Ventura County, California found that the day care mothers "were attuned to the characteristics of the children that professionals might classify as symptomatic of emotional or mental disturbance". It was found that these minders were not only sensitive to children at risk but showed an interest to learn more about these children's problems.

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