

# **DAY CARE CENTRES**

## **POLICY AND STRATEGY**

### **Introduction**

Following a discussion of the Health Policy and Strategy Memorandum, presented by the Minister for Health, in December 1989, to the Council of Ministers, the Council resolved that the proposed Health Policy and Strategy be approved for implementation with the exception of the portfolio responsibility for Day Care Centres which should transfer to the Ministry of Education and Youth. The latter should subsequently submit its policy and strategy proposals with regard to the operation of the Day Care Centres on a fee-paying basis.

This should follow Government Policy which encourages the development of Day Care Centres in districts and places of work where working parents will be able to leave their children for a fee. These centers will **provide a hygienic** and **stimulating environment** for the **development of the child**.

The following Policy and Strategy Paper is presented for consideration in compliance with this directive.

### **Background**

Care for young children in groups outside their homes for part of the day has become common all over the world. Actually, there is nothing new about such care, and throughout history most families have needed to supplement parental attention with care provided by other persons (relatives, siblings, neighbours, locally identifies 'specialists', and so on). In many cultures, such supplementary care was almost routine for either the very privileged, who could afford to pay for the services, or for the under privileged, who had to improvise child care in order that mothers could contribute to the economic life of the family. What is relatively new, however, is the extent to which such care is now needed by all families, not just the very rich and the poor.

In recent years rapid social change in many countries, has led to changes in family structure and an increased number of working mothers. This in turn had led increased services for the care of preschool children while parents are away from home.

Although child-minding was the initial aim of day care services, the increasing understanding of the preschool age potential has led to the notion of making use of time children are together for further enhancement of their cognitive, emotional, social development and of introducing physical and mental health into day care.

### **The Seychelles Situation**

The Seychelles situation is seen as following the world trend very closely.

The traditional child care for the privileged through the employment of child-minders and of the poor through the assistance of the extended family has existed for years.

The increase in the number of working mothers due to the social changes in family structure is also evident.

It would appear that the Seychellois family is gradually evolving towards the nuclear family type, consisting of only the parents and children. The possibility of child-minding being done by members of the extended family is thus removed to some extent. The movement away from the family neighbourhood also reinforces this trend.

The Seychellois working mother who has no relative living at home has, therefore, to leave her baby or young child in the care of a neighbour or seek assistance from a child-minder or a child care centre.

### **Child-Minder**

In the literature on the subject a distinction between a neighbour and a child-minder is often made, the child-minder being, for the most part, an officially recognized person. Specialists in the field of child care recommend that present arrangements – should remain because it satisfies the needs of many families and has distinct advantages, not the least important being lower cost and time-saving by eliminating lengthy traveling.

Official recognition of neighbours who take up child –minding in a permanent way is recommended by the specialists in the field as this would facilitate control and assistance by social workers. This is a suggested development for the future. Appropriate training, leading to official recognition, could be provided if sufficient demand exists.

### **Day Care Centre**

This is a more formal and structured approach to the child care problem and as stated in the introduction, is to be fee-paying in the Seychelles.

The Child Care Centre is often a business enterprise which is operated for profit as well as for **altruistic** motives. The establishment of necessary controls to ensure that the centres are not merely money making operations at the expense of the working mother is a key element of this paper and the strategy proposed aims at establishing appropriate controls.

It is also expected that the Day Care Centre will take into consideration the pre-school age potential and extend its activities well beyond the child-minding level to include the enhancement of the child's cognitive, emotional, social and moral development as well as his physical and mental health.

Needless to say that this is a more complex and costly approach to child care. However, given the present social conditions, it is considered a necessary and urgent development.

As can be expected, services provided by the day care centers vary widely. However, all must meet certain minimum standard for the award of a licence. The award of a licence is conditional on receiving a positive appraisal form from a panel of inspectors. Representatives from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Youth and Seychelles Licensing Authority make up the panel of inspectors. The standards apparently need not be rigid since small centers, which may not provide all the physical facilities like those of a larger centre have the advantage of allowing the persons in charge to follow the development of individual children more closely.

Fees vary widely and are commensurate in a certain measure, with the services provided. The minimum fee charged at present is SR450 and the maximum is SR1000 per month.

It is evident that there is a need to expand the availability of child care in day care centers and to establish clear and realistic minimum and optimum standards.

### **Policy**

The establishment of Day Care Centres is a result of two basic principles. That of providing for the social needs of the country's citizens and that of providing for the educational needs of these same citizens.

The creation of day care centres in Seychelles primarily satisfies the social need of the working mother. It facilitates women's socio-economic integration into society. It thus enables women to assume their rightful place in society in the dual role of motherhood and the pursuance of a personal socio-economic career.

The creation of Day Care Centres also satisfies the educational needs of the child. These needs are organised in the three basic guiding principles of education policy in Seychelles, namely: Education for All, Education for Life and Education for Personal and National Development.

The importance of the, pre-school period for the cognitive, emotional and social development is now recognized and these needs must be met either by the home or by the assistance of other agencies. The Day Care Centres are seen as being one of the valid agencies and, in some instances, a necessary agency.

Since the social needs of the working mother and the educational needs of her child can be provided by such diverse agencies as the home, the neighbour, the child-minder and the day care centres, it appears appropriate that the Day Care Centres be considered as one of the up-scale options of child care and, as a consequence, that the centres operate on a fee-paying basis under regulations established to ensure minimum standards.

In view of the importance of the educational and social aspects involved the Day Care Centres will fall under the portfolio responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Youth.

## **Strategy**

### **Day Care Centres**

In keeping with the educational and social policy of Seychelles the Day Care Centres operating in Seychelles, be they public or private, will aim at providing for the social needs of the working mother and the educational needs of her child.

Public Day Care Centres can be attached to an existing primary school either as an extension to a crèche or as a separate unit parallel to the crèche. Alternately for the centres could be attached to the District Councils. All rules and regulations in force in the Public Service and in the schools as well as those specific to Day Care Centres would be followed. In view of the fact that the specialist services are provided to a relatively small segment of the population age group, fees, commensurate with the services provided will be paid.

Private Day Care Centres will be licensed to operate as fee paying establishments. They will be operated in accordance with the standards specified by the Ministry of Education and Youth. In some instances leased facilities could be provided especially in areas where a centre is needed but no one has the financial resources to build and equip the centre.

The Ministry of Education and Youth will provide the necessary assessment to guarantee compliance with basic standards.

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### **Operating Agencies**

For private Day Care Centres any licensed person, group or corporate body will be authorized to operate Day Care Centres.

### **Licences**

Licenses for the operation of Day Care Centres are issued by the Seychelles Licensing Authority for a period of one year, renewable annually. The licensing and the renewal will be subject to the approval of the Ministry of Education and Youth which will conduct an annual assessment well in advance of the expiry date. In general the Ministry of Education will attempt to provide guidance in order to maintain and improve standards.

### **Fees**

In general, fees will reflect the cost of services provided. The operators of Day Care Centres will operate the centres in conformity with the laws of Seychelles governing fiscal matters. In addition the operators will be guided by the standards set by the Ministry of Education and Youth for the administration of Day Care Centres.

### **Administrative Framework**

There should be no lower age limit for admission into Day Care Centre. Children up to the age of 3 years (age when they start school) can be accepted. However the ability to cater for the age group in question must be taken into consideration. It is noted that some centres may not be able to cope with the very young children but they may be able to provide adequate care for an older group.

The centre should be open from 7.00 am to 5.00 pm or as necessary to allow parents time to travel to work and back, bearing in mind that work places may not always be close to the centre. In general the centres should operate throughout the day.

Although no limit is imposed it is considered that establishments taking 20 to 30 children would be more educational and more manageable than larger ones. Children require more personal and individual attention, for they need to build up a close relationship with a mother-substitute.

### **Educational Aspects**

Preparation prior to joining the centre is important

- the child will be moving to new surroundings
- he/she will be building up new relationships with new people

- both the mother and child will have to learn to cope with separation

Thus, when parents apply for registration of a child in a centre it is essential that they are made aware of how the centre functions, that they are shown around the premises and that their questions are answered. Furthermore it is advisable that during the first few days after admission the child should stay for a progressively longer period so that the minder can establish a trusting relationship with the child and parents.

In addition to child care the centre should provide an educational and social environment for the small children as well as a meeting place for their mothers.

### **The Child's Basic Requirements**

Change of clothes, meals, rest, toilet, etc should be provided regularly by the same person so that the child can build up a secure relationship.

### **The Personnel**

The optimum number for centres is considered to be 4 to 9 children per adult depending on age groups. Minimum number should not exceed the 15:1 ratio for 3 year old and the 9:1 ratio for the 1.5 to 3 year olds.

The children are grouped in terms of age so that two groups of children and two adults live and work together.

A commendable staffing situation for a centre admitting 30 children would be:

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### **Staff Training**

The staff (including the head and assistant head of the centre) should be familiar with the emotional, physical, intellectual and language development of children between 0 to 3½ years of age. They should know how to organise the various social and educational activities of the centre.

It is not necessary to have a medical nurse attached to the centre but regular visits by nurse or doctor should be made.

It is important that the operator or other members of her staff should have knowledge on "Child Development" from 0-3½ years. Early every year the Education Coordinators in Early Childhood at the Ministry of Education and Youth conducted 8 training sessions for Day Care operators or assistants on different activities mainly language, pre-maths, gross motor and fine motor.

### **WHO Standards Schedule**

The Ministry of Education and Youth will publish a schedule of standards for the conduct of Day Care Centres based on the WHO Standards Schedule which is considered appropriate for the Seychelles. Since this schedule aims at setting not only minimum standard but optimum standards as well it will be used both to assess minimum attainments for licensing and guidance for product improvement. Essential items related to minimum standards will be clearly identified. The WHO Standards Schedule is presented below and is considered as an integral part of this presentation. Refer to Annex 2 for WHO Standard Schedule.

## **CHILD CARE CENTRE FACILITY SCHEDULE**

### **I. Physical Environment**

1. The indoor environment is spacious enough for the number of children present.
2. The indoor environment is attractive and pleasant.
3. The sounds of the centre are generally moderate and pleasant: children laughing and talking happily, adults' voices conveying positive feelings, with neither shouting nor a tense quiet.
4. Sufficient and appropriate materials and equipments are available for use by the children.

5. Adequate space is provided for children to store their personal belongings or 'take home' products.
6. Areas are available in which children can be somewhat along occasionally, while still being within eye range of supervising adults.
7. The indoor area is safe.
8. The outdoor areas provide space and opportunity for vigorous activities.
9. A separate area for sleeping is provided, spacious enough for the number of children who use it.
10. The centre looks clean and well-cared for, especially in areas like the kitchen and the bathroom.
11. Toilets, soap and water (for drinking and washing) are accessible to the children.
12. All rooms are well-lighted.
13. All rooms are well-ventilated.

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## **II. Health and Safety**

14. The centre meets local standards for protection of the health and safety of children in group settings.
15. Annual physical examinations are required of staff.
16. Written health records are maintained for all children.
17. The centre assumes responsibility for safe arrival and departure of all children.
18. Children are carefully supervised, with at least two adults on the premises at all times.
19. Staff is attentive to health and development of each child and: if necessary alert the parents to areas for professional help.
20. All caregiving staff members have been trained in first aid.
21. Staff follow everyday hygienic principles in looking after the children (e.g washing their hands with soap and water after all toilet activities and before feeding the children).
22. All dangerous chemicals such as medicines or cleaning products are stored out of the children's reach.
23. A first aid kit is available on the premises.
24. A fire extinguisher is available on the premises and all staff members know how to use it.

## **III. Nutrition and Food Service**

25. Meals and/or snacks are served that meet the children's recommended nutritional requirements.
26. Meal times are used by staff to promote good nutrition.
27. Whether food is prepared on the premises or elsewhere, local standards for serving food are complied with.

28. Eating utensils are properly washed and stored.

#### **IV. Administration**

29. Most of the caregiving staff are fulltime employees.

30. The majority of the caregiving staff have been employed fulltime in the centre for a minimum of 6 months.

31. Regardless of caregiver: child ratio, the number of children who are together for most of the day (group size) for infants up to 18 months of age should not exceed 12.

32. Regardless of the group size, the caregiver: child ratio for infants up to 18 months of age should not exceed 1:4.

33. Regardless of the caregiver: child ratio, the group size for children aged 18-36 months should not exceed 18.

34. At least once a year the director/supervisor meets individually with all staff members to discuss with them the quality of their work.

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35. Staff, other professionals, and parents meet formally to evaluate the extent to which the programme meets the needs of both children and parents.

#### **V. Staff Family Interaction**

36. A process for introducing the centre's programme to parents and children is followed.

37. Parents and other family members are encouraged to be involved in the programme in various ways, and there are no rules prohibiting their unannounced visits.

38. At least once a year an appropriate staff member individually discusses each child's progress with the parent (s).

39. Parents are kept informed about the centre's programme through regular newsletters, announcements, notes, conversations, etc.

40. Provision is made for regular parent-staff interaction at the time of the child's arrival or departure.

#### **VI. Staff-Children Interaction**

41. Staff encourage children to share experiences and feelings and are responsive to the children's needs.

42. Staff speak frequently to the children, always in a friendly, positive and courteous manner.

43. Staff respect the cultural backgrounds of the children and adapt the learning situation to preserve their heritage and acquaint other children with the cultural legacy of all members of the group.

44. Staff use positive techniques of guidance, such as positive reinforcement and encouragement.

45. Staff respect the child's right to choose not participate in group activities occasionally.

#### **VII. Observable Child Behaviour**

46. Children appear to be comfortable, relaxed, happy and involved in their activities.

47. Children respect the needs, feelings and property of others (e.g take turn, share toys).

48. Children respond appropriately to the caregivers requests.

49. During free time, the children are actively involved with materials provided by the centre and with one another.

50. Most of the time the children are friendly to staff, to one another, and to visitors.

51. Children do not become disorganised or unruly when hanging from one activity to another.

## VII. Curriculum

52. The daily schedule is planned to provide a variety of activities, including those that are indoor/outdoor, quiet/active, individual/small group/large group.

53. Teaching/learning activities are chosen which foster positive self-concepts and social skills in the children.

54. Teaching/learning activities encourage language development and help children improve their ability to think, reason, question and experiment.

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55. Teaching/learning activities encourage creative expression and appreciation of the arts.

56. Teaching/learning activities enhance physical development and skills.

57. Teaching/learning activities encourage good health habits (nutrition, hand washing, teeth brushing).

58. Simple house-keeping tasks (table setting, clearing up, etc) are incorporated into the programme as a means of furthering the children's self-help and social skills.

### Observation and Scoring

The items in the schedule are to be used to guide observations made in child care programmes to determine whether they represent high quality environments for young children. Ratings are to be based both on what is observed and on information obtained through an interview with a responsible staff member (more than one if needed).

- 3 Conditions fully exist
- 2 Conditions adequately exist
- 1 Conditions partly exist
- 0 Conditions do not exist

For the purpose of licensing a minimum overall rating, established by the Ministry of Education and Youth, must be attained and all essential conditions must adequately exist.

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