



QUALITY A CH

The everyday clamorous din of children laughing, crying, playing, and generally interacting with one another represents the happy external features of the U of A's HUB day care. Beneath the surface, however, is an everyday challenge to maintain quality day care while riding the turbulent waves of economic underfunding and bureaucratic resistance to change.

Kate Watts, director of the HUB day care, has often been frustrated by provincial government attitudes towards day care. She likens day care to any other public school system where quality is the norm.

"Day care," she says, "is here to stay. Good day care costs and the provincial government should recognize this. I'd like to see a system where children are guaranteed a healthy learning experience. Parents shouldn't have to shop around for day care. They don't have to shop for schools."

HUB day care is funded by both the province and the City of Edmonton. Watts receives an operating grant from the provincial branch of social services for maintenance of staff to child ratios that are necessary to run the day care. Parents apply for a subsidy based on income that goes directly to the day care. The City funds the remainder of the

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Day care dollar daze

Day care subsidies are calculated according to a sliding scale. If a subsidized client's income rises with inflation, subsidies are cut. However, provincial government subsidies for low and moderate income families have been frozen since 1982. During that time the cost of living has risen by approximately one third.

The government set the maximum subsidy for one child at \$195 per month in 1982. For any additional children, the maximum is \$240. This subsidy ceiling assumes that no child care centre would charge more than \$240 per month, while day care operators in Alberta say that rates now range from \$275 per month to more than \$400. According to Kate Watts, director for HUB day care, her total cost for care per child is \$383.

The maximum charge a subsidized low income parent will pay today, as in 1982, is \$45 per month. But depending on the day care, the same parent on the same income might be forced to pay upwards of \$100 now, and more if she

has two children.

The client pays the excess charge over and above the maximum provincial subsidy. As well, if you make more money, your subsidy is reduced and you pay more.

Each day care receives a provincial operating grant for every space they have. The grant is for hiring of staff to correspond to government stipulated ratios of staff to children. The ratio for working with two year olds is one staff member to five children. For three to four year olds it's 1:8, and five years 1:10.

The operating allowance the centre receives is \$131 a month for children under 3 years old, three to four years is \$78-\$50, and for five year olds the centre receives \$65.

It should be noted however, that the 64 spaces at HUB day care can qualify for an operating allowance only if the child is at the centre 84 hours or more a month, something clients often fail to take into account.



government money allocated to the day care.

Unfortunately, all the funding does not add up as the centre still must grapple with a \$13 deficit for each family with children at the day care. In the end, the deficit is carried by surplus savings that are better utilized for repairs or resources for the children.

The \$13 per family deficit that HUB day care faces is a result of the City "not deficit funding us up to our full

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Feature and
by Kevin L