

Preschool Centre Inc. plans to build new premises

By NEIL DICKIE

Preschool Centre Inc., a private charitable daycare organization located in temporary quarters just below Annex B on campus is planning to build new premises.

They are to be located on a University of New Brunswick owned vacant lot on the West side of Windsor street just below Kings College Road. UNB will lease the property on a lease loan basis to be re-negotiated after twenty-one years.

The centre is now negotiating with contractors for an appropriate design and price, said the centre's director, Donna Weber.

Weber said that the new preschool centre will be financed by funds accumulated by the centre through a Beaverbrook foundation grant of \$50,000 and donations from parents. The building will be constructed so as to be "safe, comfortable and convenient, and as cheaply built as possible"; it will be large enough to hold 100 children.

At this time the centre has 63 regular attending children, and 12 full-time staff teachers.

Weber said that the centre's present accommodation is "very restrictive, especially in terms of space". "The playground is very bad", she said, "and we cook a hot lunch for 50 children every day in a kitchen no more than average size". Debby Boudreau, a staff member and nursery school teacher said the children need more space to play in, and things that they can "climb on and swing on and crawl through".

Kids at the centre age from two to six years. Although about half the kids there have student and faculty parents, the centre is meant for the general public. Fees for a full-time student are \$70 per month, for half time students \$35; the price includes, in the winter season, a hot lunch every day. Preschool hours are 8:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The centre handles its attendants in three groups: playschool, for children aged two; nursery school, for kids aged three and four; and kindergarten, for those aged five.

The outside of the centre is unpainted, and has been so for quite a few years; the general structure is also rickety.

The interior is another story. The staff has done an excellent job of making classrooms colourful, warm to the eye and generally appealing. The rooms are chalk full of toys, sandboxes, games, paints, maps pictures: a stimulating environment for preschool learning has been created inside.

The centre started out as a "cooperative" seven years ago said the Director. However, parents found as it went on that it was difficult to meet their obligations there, particularly at exam time. Now active volunteers, many of them psychology students,

participate and help out under the direction of staff members. Weber stressed that the volunteers don't "test" the children in any way without express parental consent.

Weber noted that staff members are "very dedicated" and "excellent teachers". "They enjoy their work as much as the children". She attributed the comparatively high staff turnover rate to low salaries. Teachers "often do leave for higher paying jobs", she said.

Preschool Centre Inc. has no formal affiliation with other community daycare centres such as the Co-op centre at 780 Montgomery; however they do "cooperate". "If we have too many kids down here we often send some up there".

The centre is NOT a babysitting service, said Weber. "Children need so much more than a custodial service". Anything else would be a disservice and not a service. Parents usually bring children here in particular, for stimulation of this type.

Staff members are careful to take "any suggestions parents have that may be valid" and integrate them into the system. Parents are encouraged to volunteer their help, especially if they have special knowledge of some kind that might be of interest to the children or example, botanists, artists, or persons reared in different cultures. "For example a parent from Africa might come in and talk about what children in Ghana do when they get out of bed in the morning."

Weber described her own experience (of four years) at the centre as "very gratifying" in spite of comparatively low wages. "We are performing a community service; one that is very necessary in this time and place."

Debby Boudreau agrees. She indicated that with day care it is possible for women and child to see each other when they are more at their best. "Society places a strain on a woman when she is forced to be with her children all the time." She said that there is a misplaced emphasis on children rearing within the limited confines of the nuclear family. "There is not enough emphasis on quality childrearing - but rather on type of childrearing" she said, "one woman - one set of kids". With daycare, women can share things and experiences more meaningfully with their children because they don't "crowd each other". Therefore she said, "Parent and child tend to enjoy each others company to a much greater extent."

Donna Weber said that "we make an effort to make the school a pleasant place; the children certainly seem to enjoy it. The teachers really enjoy the set-up. Children are sensitive and quick to pick up disinterest in a teacher."

Weber stressed human development - in terms of the child's own personality and interests. "After the program (if it is successful) the children are more coordinated physically and mentally."

She emphasized the "socializing aspect" of the group programme, and that children are encouraged to use their own creativity. She said that "school projects do have a desired end but that the children "usually end up creating their own crafts."

The preschool approach to education is largely unstructured.

"We have no curriculum that has to be finished by a specific date" as in typical public schools. This is a developmental course and not an academic one. The children are learning to be aware. We hope that

the children will discover most information themselves by being in an environment that lends itself to this".

"Children seem to be pretty secure, ready, familiar with things like water and paints. They all understand letters and numbers.

By school age they are usually quite quick to pick up elementary concepts. We think that with their experience here children will be more ready for academic progress." School teachers comment often on our children's general good learning readiness" Weber said.

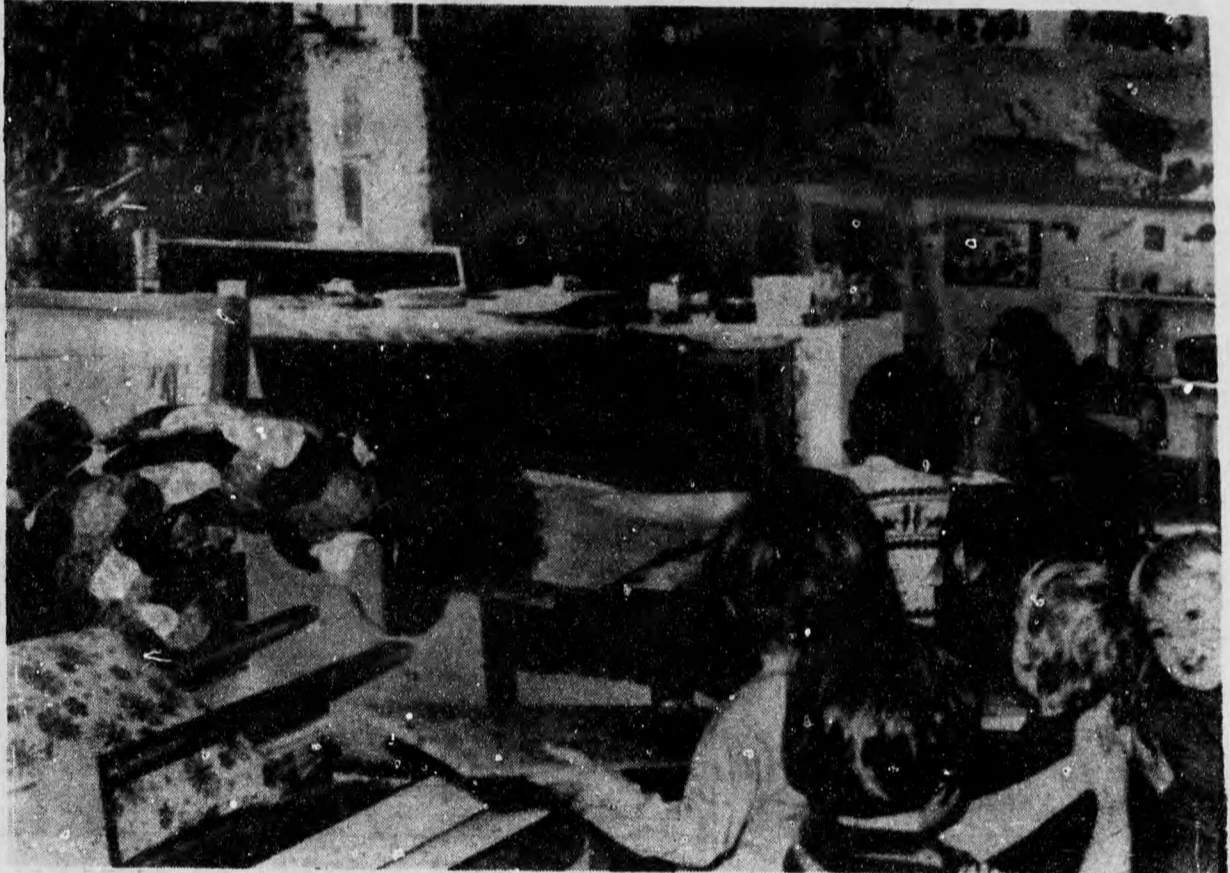


Photo by Gary Smith

The Preschool Centre, now located on campus, is negotiating with a contractor for new premises. Space restricts the number of children the centre can hold, according to director Donna Weber.

**Yearbook
organizational
meeting
Tuesday**

There will be a yearbook organizational meeting on Tuesday, October 30 in Room 26 of the Student Union Building from 7:15 to 8:30 PM.

Anyone wishing to contribute input to the yearbook this year is invited to attend.

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