

CITY KIDS' CARE CHALLENGE

classification," said Watts, "because the City says there is not enough to go around to all the day cares." Edmonton has steadily cut back funding, citing provincial responsibility.

Watts noted she is "not knocking the City. There are 18 municipally funded day cares in Edmonton and they have been very good to day care. They have set high standards and funded it in the past so that low income families can have access to day care."

Day cares that are not municipally funded can surcharge in order to overtake deficits, but the City will not allow Watts to surcharge the extra \$13 per family because the majority of her clients are subsidized students, and "we would lose funding altogether."

Watts explained that a large part of her funding problem stems from a drop in enrollment during the summer months. She fills her limit of 64 spaces during the university school year, but last summer only 42 spaces were occupied.

"The City only funds for spaces filled," she said. "You run with 20 odd spaces empty for three months, which is a quarter of the year, that sure hits your budget. If we could run with 64 spaces all year, we wouldn't have a deficit."

Because HUB day care is primarily

although it would be very easy for the SU to pick up their deficit, but it makes more sense to ensure funding agencies making up for the deficit. Otherwise, if they see another funding source, they tend to cut back every year."

Help, LaGrange notes, comes in the way of a summer ad strategy and a municipal lobby campaign. "We're sending letters to the mayor, aldermen, and the chairman of the sub-committee to let them know what a great service it is and that we need it, and the SU is also starting an ad program to try to get more kids enrolled in the summer," he said.

Watts tries to maintain a quality atmosphere at HUB day care. She accepts a few children with special needs and provides a kindergarden program.

As well, she says, "We give preference to people returning." Older children are moved into new age bracket slots each year resulting in "only about 15 new spaces each year," she said, adding, "the only room empty is for 2 year olds."

Watts points out that giving preference to returning clients "provides continuity for the children when they can come back to the same place each year. There is less trauma than moving to a new day care every year. The teachers are here; it's like coming home."

The provincial government on the other hand, does not seem as concerned about quality care when their employment guidelines are reviewed.

According to Watts, "The province says to work with children in a day care

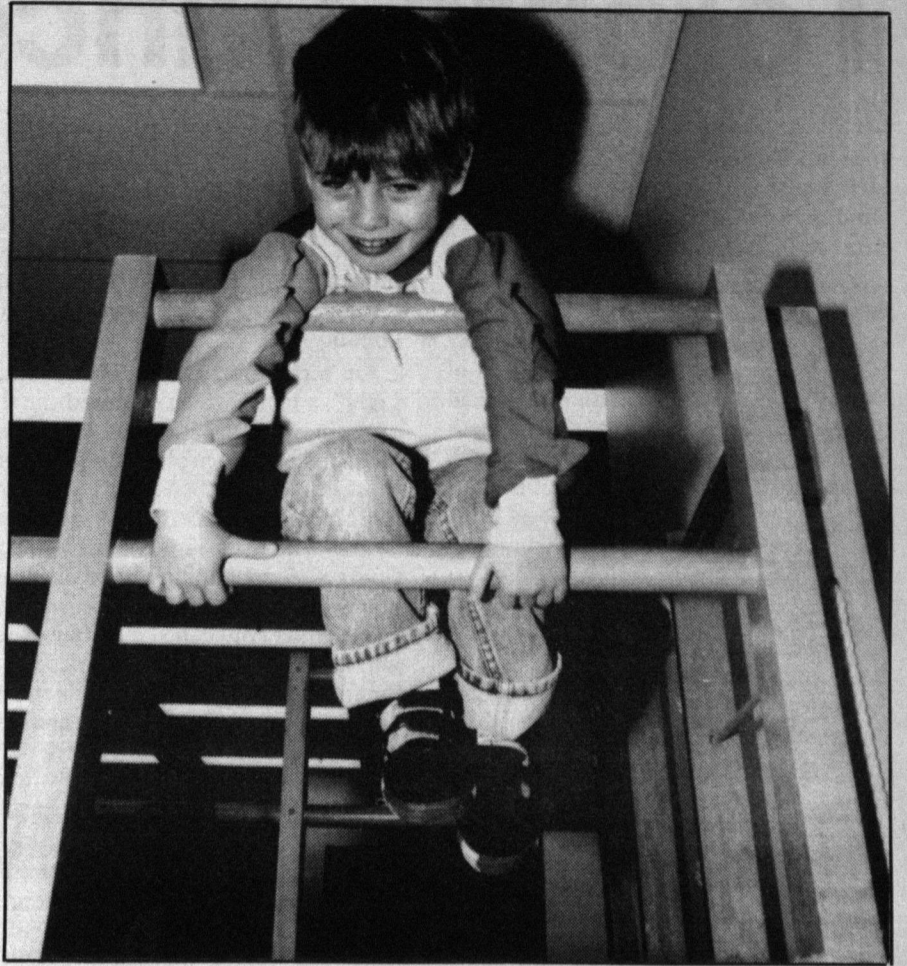
"Do you know you need more qualifications to work with animals at the zoo than you do with children?"

you have to be 18 years of age or older — that's it. They don't even say a grade six education. Do you know you need more qualifications to work with animals at the zoo than you do with children?"

Municipal standards are higher. In order to qualify for municipal funding, all staff must have at least two years post-secondary training in early childhood development. Staff at HUB day care meet this requirement, but the field as a whole suffers from extremely low wages and high staff turnover rate.

Watts tries to pay her staff more than the average because, she says, "If staff is always leaving, the children stop trusting."

The provincial perspective on needed changes to the day care policy was summed up by Diane McAmmond, provincial executive director of family support. She said that "Ms. Osterman has been looking at day care funding for over a year. She is looking at whether subsidy rates are high enough... the whole range of services is being scrutinized... and we can expect an announcement soon."



HUB day care helps single mom

Trish Kumpf is a fully subsidized single mother and student at the U of A who is grateful for the existence of HUB day care. Her five year old son attends the kindergarden program at the centre.

Kumpf has high regard for the professional maintenance of municipal day cares. "They set high standards in nutrition and staff training which I am especially happy with," she said.

She went on to compare other centres, saying, "I have been in other day care situations and they have been appalling." She noted such examples as open electric sockets and untrained staff, as well as inappropriate staff ratios.

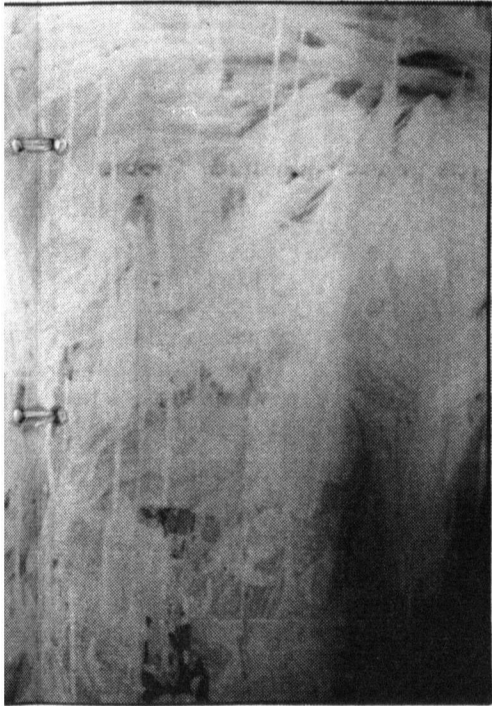
"Knowing staff has training makes all the difference in the world," Kumpf said. "If a problem arises, they know

how to deal with it."

Kumpf also expressed some concern with subsidies. "It's not a benefit to make more income," she said. "I feel stymied by subsidy limitations."

Funding aside, Kumpf is adamant in her high regard for properly trained staff. In her view, they suffer from lack of appreciation. "One thing I'd like to see, and I don't think we unfortunately will, is an awareness of (child care) workers, some more respect."

"Some people say why should we subsidize day care," Kumpf said, "But we subsidize schools and universities." To her, and many others, there is little difference. She feels quality day care "enhances families. I know his (Kumpf's son's) development is being enhanced."



used by students of the University, the Students' Union has been highly supportive of the day care, and Watts is grateful for their input.

"The SU does not support the day care with operating funds, but we do provide them with capital funds," said president Paul LaGrange. "We gave them a grant last year of \$5,000 (which was applied to a new playground)."

"Kate asked for help," LaGrange said, adding, "she didn't ask for financial help,

and photos
in Law

