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# The New Haven Child Care Center

## —AN ACCOUNT OF ITS ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATION

*The fact that "there was a tradition of interest in the preschool child in New Haven" is a thoughtful cue well worth noting by other communities interested in establishing child care programs. Dr. Gesell, Director of the Clinic of Child Development, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, gives chronologically the sequence by which this tradition of interest developed, from the days of FERA to the present.*

THE NEW HAVEN CHILD CARE CENTER has been rather widely heralded by the public press as the first center to receive a substantial federal grant under the Lanham Act. There has been not a little curiosity to know how it was done. For this reason I have been asked to write a brief account.

After all, it is not surprising that a community program for the child care of working mothers came to early crystallization in Connecticut. There was a tradition of interest in the preschool child in New Haven. Seven nursery units had been established as WPA projects in as many local public schools as early as 1937. Connecticut is an industrial state studded with numerous manufacturing plants, large and small, for the production of the munitions and appurtenances of war. The Connecticut State Defense Council was among the first to organize a comprehensive program of preparedness. A state committee on child

care was promptly formed. Early in 1942 this committee issued a detailed report with concrete specifications covering emergency child care programs. The report was printed as a state bulletin and has exerted an important influence in determining standards and procedures for communities.

The primary and moving forces behind the New Haven child care project, however, were local in origin. The WPA nursery schools, the educational research committee of the New Haven State Teachers College, and finally a thoroughgoing case work survey by a subcommittee of the Council of Social Agencies of New Haven served to define the need of day care for the children of working mothers.

The various steps which were taken before the child care center became a reality were many. The center does not owe all of its existence to a generous Lanham largess brought in a basket by a stork flown from the Capitol dome in Washington. It took many a conference and much hard work to draw up the certificate of purposes required by law to secure funds under the Lanham Act. The exacting nature of this certificate should not be set down as mere red tape. It represents the method which the government properly uses to safeguard its monies. The processing of the certificate puts the local community on its mettle.

The initiative and responsibility of the local community in the organization of

child care facilities should be emphasized. The U. S. Children's Bureau has consistently adhered to a democratic policy which fosters community effort and avoids imposition of "bureaucratic control from Washington." The present pattern of organization, as exemplified by the New Haven project, permits local communities, state agencies, and the federal government to function cooperatively.

The principle of democratic control should be protected, and should be extended to the parents of the children concerned. The problems of child care are so utterly complex that they cannot be solved on a mass basis even by an American Kaiser or by assembly line methods. There are 16,000,000 homemakers without children under sixteen who are not now in the labor market. We should draw on this vast pool of women workers before we freely separate mother and young child.

The problems must be solved by individualized, democratic social service—by a counselling service through which mothers can get information and advice *before they sign up for a job*. Every family situation is unique. It must be talked out. If the baby is under two years of age, the home has unquestionable priority over the factory. If the child is between two and six years of age, the home claims are still the strongest. A good nursery school and an adequate grandmother may make *part time*, outside maternal employment practicable, but the pros and cons must be talked out. If the child is of school age, a supervised midday lunch and after-school care are a necessity. If the mother has three or more growing children of assorted ages, should industrial employment be considered at all? A community counselling service will help to answer these questions. It will help to conserve womanpower and to direct parental patriotism into the right channels.

All this means that there should be

basic parent participation in planning. Parents desire to pay a child care fee but they do not want a quasi-authoritarian type of service imposed from overhead, in which social workers expertly tell them just how to solve a family problem. The parents would like to regard the counselling service as an information and guidance service which belongs to them in the same sense that public school education belongs to them. Part of the counselling service in the New Haven project was set up at the center itself. Here it could function naturally in a natural setting and it has been much appreciated by its clients.

This kind of counselling has served to preserve the status of the family as the fundamental social unit. The great importance of the care of children of school age was thereby kept in focus. The New Haven project was developed with equal regard for the preschool child and the school child. The Scranton Public School became an organic part of the enterprise. A midday hot lunch is now served both at the school and at the center, the children of kindergarten age eating at the center, and some of them remaining throughout the afternoon. The after-school recreational program includes arts and crafts, hobbies, movies, dramatics, games, and a school band. These activities are so enviable that the outside children look on wistfully and even say, "I wish my mother would work!"

High school boys and girls are not yet in the picture. They may be in time, as members of the High School Victory Corps, earning the white cross arm band, the insignia for child care, nutrition, home nursing, and home-making services.

And so we see that the vital essence in the genesis of the child care center has been the drawing together of the varied social forces and agencies which constitute a local community. The state and the na-

tional government play important roles, but the creative origins and realities are in the individual home, the neighborhood, the school district, the city. By reading the adjoined chronology in sequence and between the lines, the reader may get a concrete impression of how one child center took shape, step by step.

#### *Chronology of the New Haven Center*

1934. First emergency nursery school established under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The Yale Clinic of Child Development, the Yale Department of Education, and the Cannon Nursery School served as observation and advisory centers for the teachers who assumed supervision of these schools.

1937. Seven WPA nursery units were in operation in seven public schools.

1938. The Educational Research Committee (May Hall James, chairman) of the New Haven State Teachers College issued a factual and interpretive bulletin, *Nursery Education*, with special reference to the local situation.

1940. Teachers, college faculty and students inaugurated a voluntary after-school recreational program for school children from the Scranton School district. The activities included basketball, swimming, arts and crafts.

1941. A subcommittee of the Council of Social Agencies of New Haven sponsored a survey to determine the need for day care for the children of working parents. This survey was followed by a case work study in which thirty-three different agencies were consulted, supplying definite information in regard to conditions. The agencies were diversified, including the Connecticut State Employment Bureau, the police department, the Salvation Army, the Council of Churches, the Visiting Nurse Association, the Chamber of Commerce, etc. The superintendent of public schools cooperated. Personnel managers in various industries were contacted. An article was published in each of the local newspapers. A total of one hundred forty-four families with three hundred ninety-one children sixteen years of age and under was studied in detail with respect to child care needs. Several recommendations were formulated:

1. That there be a continuing center for consultation for parents who wish to discuss problems created for families and children when

mothers go to work. Families have used this service during the study and the value of it has been indicated.

2. That at least two new child care groups be set up.

3. That a foster day care program for New Haven be instituted.

4. That the possibility of a visiting house-keeper program be explored.

5. That the need for school lunches and supervision during lunch time and before and after school be made known.

6. That the Group Work and Recreational Section of the Council be advised of the need for additional facilities for recreation.

The principal and teachers of the Scranton School made a supplementary study of the needs peculiar to their district. On the basis of these findings, the New Haven State Teachers College called together representatives from the Day Care Committee of the Council of Social Agencies and from the public school systems for a better coordination of efforts for day care in this area of the community. This group requested the New Haven Defense Council to appoint a committee on child care under the Division of Health, Welfare, and Recreation.

February 1942. The State Defense Council Committee on Child Care issued a concrete detailed report, *Emergency Child Care Programs with Special Reference to Care of Children of Working Mothers*. All planning for the New Haven project has been carried out in accordance with the standards outlined in this report which was later printed as a state document. The state committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. N. S. Light of the State Department of Education, included representatives of the State Department of Health, the Connecticut State Employment Service, the Manufacturers' Association of Connecticut, the State Department of Public Welfare, the Connecticut Conference of Social Work.

The New Haven project is carried out under the continuing supervision of the state Committee on Child Care. The supervision of the project locally is the responsibility of the faculty of the teachers college. The board of education has appointed Mr. Finis E. Englemann, president of the New Haven State Teachers College, to run the project. Mr. Englemann is technically an employee of the board of education but will work without pay. The board of education thus

retains responsibility and final authority even though most of the actual supervision is carried out by the staff of the teachers college.

An advisory committee was formed, with the following membership: (1) professor from New Haven State Teachers College, chairman; (2) executive secretary, Family Society; (3) representative of Division of Health, Welfare, and Recreation; (4) representative of Visiting Nurse Association; (5) representative of the YWCA; (6) representative of the New Haven City Council of the PTA; (7) representative of the New Haven Public Schools; (8) principal of Scranton School; (9) child specialist from New Haven State Teachers College; (10) director of Nursery School Unit; (11) director of After-School Recreational Unit; (12) consultant to parents from Council of Social Agencies, and (13) representative parents.

*June 1942.* The organizing group drew up a highly detailed memorandum of eighteen pages to support the certificate of purposes required in applying for funds under the Lanham Act. This statement dealt specifically with the following subjects: (1) the area to be served; (2) existing facilities; (3) community planning; (4) how the needs will be met, (5) financial ability of the community, and (6) additional information concerning the project.

An allotment of \$30,427.30 was requested; \$15,470.00 was allotted and fees from pre-school and school children were estimated to yield a possible sum of \$14,950.00 in a single year. Expenditures were estimated for salaries, supplies, health services, rent, insurance, food, operation of plant, and educational equipment.

*August 1942.* Acquired a commodious brick residence at 63 Dwight Street, rented to New Haven State Teachers College by Yale University, at a nominal rental. The building is an attractive twelve-room house with five bathrooms. It has a large, sunny play yard. The building was formerly occupied by the WPA Art Project but had been vacant for two years and was in need of repairs and redecorating.

*September 21, 1942.* The director of the child care center, Miss Norah Clancy, arrived. Staff and services were subsequently expanded to include two head teachers, an assistant teacher, a full-time secretary, and a part-time janitor. Preparation of food was taken over by the Red

Cross Canteen. The child care assistants include students in training at the New Haven State Teachers College. A group of student and faculty volunteers assisted in the renovation, painting, and decorating of the building.

*September 1942.* A counselling and information service was set up at the child care center for the benefit of mothers considering or seeking employment. A consultant, Miss Ruth McElroy, was loaned by the Family Society to conduct the initial interviews. She discusses the total family situation and helps to fix a fee if placement of the child in the center is decided upon.

*October 1942.* The child care center opened with a small group of children and the number gradually increased to thirty-five, including five children who attend the Scranton School kindergarten in the morning. Hours are 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

An after-school recreational program is part of the total project. Children enrolled in the project attend regular classes at Scranton School in the morning and afternoon. They are served a hot lunch at noon. After school they have a recreational program until 5:30.

*December 1942.* Preschool children are being taken in each week and will continue to be enrolled until the capacity of sixty-five is reached. Various organizations cooperating at present include: Volunteer Service Bureau, Connecticut Child Welfare Association, Visiting Nurse Association, Boardman Trade School, WPA Toy Project, Scranton School Parent-Teacher Association, Girl Scouts, Alumni of Connecticut College for Women, Red Cross Canteen, Yale Clinic of Child Development (through a cooperating committee).

*December 15, 1942.* A public meeting at the Hotel Taft, on "New Haven's Two-Sided War Job: Maximum Industrial Output—Maximum Concern for Its Children," was broadcast. The meeting was addressed by Mr. Whiteside of the Manufacturers' Association; Mr. O'Neil, assistant manager of the U. S. Employment Services; Mr. Sturges, administrator of the State Defense Council; Mr. Hickerson, Miss Clancy, and Miss King of the New Haven Child Care Center, and Dr. Gesell of the Yale Clinic of Child Development. This was a community meeting designed to acquaint citizens and local agencies with the two-fold situation and the outlook for future needs.