

## **Improving Child Care Options for Student-Parents**

*This midterm letter shows a project that developed out of the writer's personal concerns. There are several typical dangers in such projects. First, it is usually best to project an appearance of disinterestedly seeking the best solution, but with a personal project it is hard to avoid the appearance of self-interest. Second, because you have personal knowledge of the problem you are tempted to expect others to take your word that the problem exists rather than doing the necessary research to show objectively that it does. Third, such projects often need to be "socialized," so that the writer looks beyond his or her own narrow concerns to see how the problem impacts a larger group of people in the community. Fourth, the writer can have difficulty getting beyond a letter of complaint format toward a sense of project that actively works to create a with the reader.*

*How well do you think this writer manages this situation? What does she do well? What could she have done better?*

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February 21, 2001

Mr. Carl Sussman  
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### **RE: ON-CAMPUS CHILD CARE**

Dear Mr. Sussman:

Your organization's mission is to improve child care programs and facilities. For students at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, the cost of child care along with inappropriate age requirements for children to be admitted, and unsuitable operating hours of the on-campus child care facilities pose a problem for parents. I feel that my project matches the objectives of your organization and therefore I ask you to consider my proposal to improve the current on-campus centers.

### **PROBLEM**

As a mother of a one-year-old, I am personally familiar with a very common problem: affordable quality child care. This issue concerns working parents, and maybe even more so, student parents, who often have a low income. Parents have several options to care for their children: relatives, in-home caregivers, family day care providers, day care centers, or staying at home (Howes). Often, relatives are not available for this service, and the

relatively expensive option of in-home caregivers is mostly not a feasible option. Consequently, the only possibility is out-of-home care, and for students, most conveniently a day care center placed on campus (Bergmann A8).

Rutgers students in New Brunswick are offered on-campus day care, although not to a satisfying degree. Child care costs are hardly affordable, the hours of operations of the existing centers are inconvenient, and only limited age groups of children are admitted.

### **Money**

Current child care facilities are too expensive for students.

In local day care centers, the average cost of a full-time enrolled infant (less than twelve months old) varies from about \$800 to \$1000 a month. Infant care is most expensive, since the child-teacher ratio is required to be at most 4:1 by New Jersey law. Rutgers University hosts two centers that provide full-time care. Both offer reduced tuition rates for Rutgers students and staff varying from \$600 a month to \$670. Still, these amounts are out of an average student's budget.

### **Age**

No care for children under 2 is available at Rutgers University in New Brunswick.

According to Carollee Howes, who works in the Children's Research Center at the University of Illinois, almost half of all mothers with children under one year of age are currently working outside their homes. Family day care is the most common out-of-home child care arrangement for infants, but the proportion of infants in center care is steadily increasing. It may be assumed that this number also includes students, showing that there is demand for care for children under the age of one at Rutgers University.

A survey conducted of 607 members of the National Coalition for Campus Child Care in 1995 showed that only 38 percent of the surveyed campus centers offer child care for infants (Thomas, Keyes and Boulton). Whereas, 98 percent of the on campus child care facilities offered care to preschool age children (three and four years of age) and 84 percent to five and six year olds' (Keyes and Boulton).

### **Open Times**

Operating hours are inconvenient to students

Classes at Rutgers University start at 8:10 a.m., but many students finish their day after the last period at 9 p.m. Most day care facilities close at 7:30 p.m., which hinders student parents from attending late classes. Many business school classes are offered exclusively after 6 p.m.

While Rutgers has implemented several child care facilities, none really fulfills all three needs to serve students well: affordable, time and age appropriate. According to their brochure, the Livingston Day Care Center admits children from 2 to 6 years of age and offers rates from \$635 to \$695 a month depending on the age of the child as well on

Rutgers affiliation. Additional rates are available which are based on income guidelines and space availability. The center operates from Monday to Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., which might be adequate for Rutgers staff, but not necessarily for students. A second on-campus center, Campus Kids, has very convenient operating hours, allowing children to stay until 9:15 p.m. The pricing is similar to the Livingston Day Care Center as well as the minimum age for enrollment (2 ½ years). Two other centers are offered by Rutgers. The Nutritional Science Nursery School offers care for 3 and 4 year olds, twice a week, for 2 ½ hours at a time. This facility, as well as the Douglass Developmental Disabilities Center are primarily run for research purposes and can only accommodate a small number of children.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 1999 population in New Jersey reached over 8.1 million including 540,000 children under four years of age. Fifty-nine percent of children under six have working parents. Transferring these numbers to the population of Rutgers students of approximately 28,400 shows that there certainly is a need for proper child care for students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

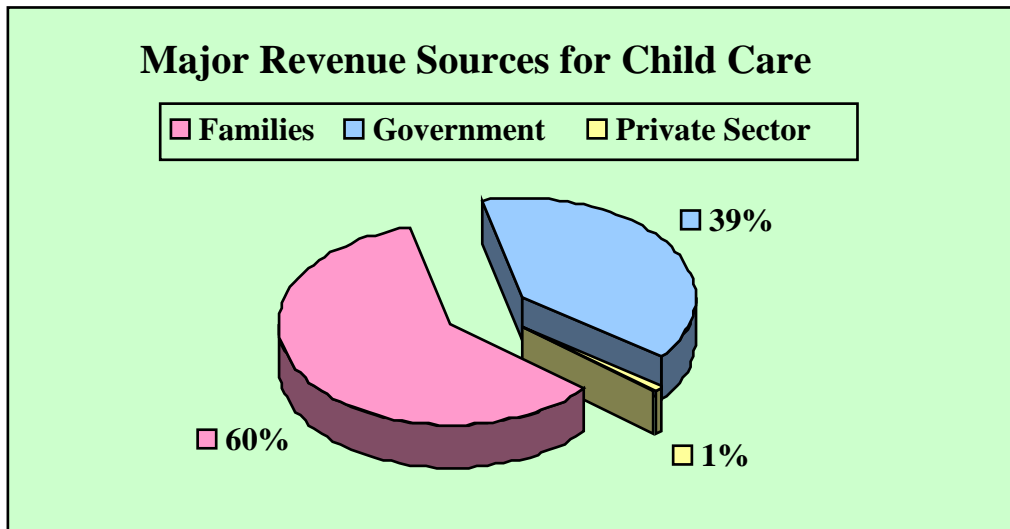
### **History of Campus Child Care**

Child care programs have existed on campuses since the turn of the century, although their focus has changed considerably within the last two decades. The first program noted in literature was a campus laboratory school at the University of Chicago. In 1916 the same faculty established the first parent cooperative. During the 1920s campus centers “provided a forum for studying children, training teachers and educating parents.” During the 1930s and 1940s these laboratory schools doubled in order to provide training for the increasing number of personnel needed in the emergency schools of the Depression and in the child care centers during World War II. In the 1970s the need for more centers rose due to the increased number of nontraditional students and the advancement of women’s issues. The 1980s saw yet another upsurge of interest in child care centers, including a re-emergence of faculty and student activity and union interest (Keyes and Boulton).

### **Financing Child Care**

The increasing demand for child care (Lombardi 3) led to greater recognition of the need for more funding for child care services (Child Care Bulletin). “According to Census Bureau figures, child care costs are on the rise (Child Care Bulletin).” Due to limited federal funding, only twelve percent of eligible children received federal assistance in 1999 (U.S. Department of Health); therefore, universities must find their own child care solutions for their students and staff. Shrinking budgets and a shift in priorities of universities often do not leave much funding for such programs like on-site day care centers (Thomas). Thus, there is a need for a more affordable solution for students at Rutgers University.

Direct funding from the government and tax relieves do take some of the burden off of families, nevertheless, families are still the main source of child care financing (see Chart).



(Source: Child Care Action Campaign)

This chart shows that there is a need to “deprivatize” child care facilities, just as they did with public schools (Bergman A9). Child care requires a lot of labor, thus costs are high and so are prices. Unfortunately, these revenues are not passed on to employees in child care centers who work for very low wages. If the government were responsible for the child care sector, just as it is for public schools, competitive wages could be paid and a professional work force could be attracted and retained (Bergman A9).

### The Facts

According to Abdullah, a writer for the New York Times, there will be roughly 6.5 million students in the U.S. aged 25 and older by the year of 2005 and the best ways to serve these students is with on-campus child care. “For many, the ability to find adequate, affordable, child care can make the difference between remaining in school or dropping out (11).” A study by Keyes and Boulton at community colleges reveals a strong relationship between the existence of centers on campus and academic success. More than 80 percent of the survey’s student parents reported that child care availability was very important in their decision to attend college. In fact, 46 percent asserted that campus child care was a first priority factor that facilitated college enrollment (4). Almost 60 percent of these parents indicated that they would not have been able to continue attending college without these child care services. Twenty-six percent of student parents that were academically successful in their first semester increased their work load the following semester. More than 95 percent cited child care as crucial in making that decision (4).

Sometimes students become so desperate as to actually bring their children to class, which certainly poses a problem to some universities (Abdullah 11).

“Employers with inadequate child care are more likely to be late for work, absent, or distracted on the job. High rates of turnover, absenteeism, and low productivity cost employers money. Investing in child care produces bottom-line benefits...” (Child Care Action Campaign). The same must be valid for all occupations, including students. Therefore it is a priority to equip not only workplaces with adequate child care centers, but universities as well.

Currently around 1,700 campuses offer on-site child care, many of which are used not only for the purpose of caring for children, but also for research purposes (Abdullah 11). Jane Ann Thomas’ research shows that 52 percent of the 607 examined campus child care centers fulfill both functions of child care service and laboratory school. This double function might facilitate the financing of such an institution and reduce the risk of falling victim to budget cuts (Thomas).

## **MY PROPOSAL**

Based on the opinions of experts who have been reviewed through the literature, it appears that Rutgers University needs a program that provides students with affordable, age appropriate and timely adequate child care. This program would need an initial investment to get started and eventually run on its own. Students who enroll their children in the program will have the opportunity to actively participate in the program and thus reduce their child care cost. An alumni association will pool its resources to assist the child care center. Senior citizens will also participate in the program in order to reduce costs and provide valuable input. In order to ensure the quality of the care, employees (full-time, students, senior citizens) will receive adequate training and all teachers will be fully certified.

The grant I am seeking will cover the costs of improving the physical space as far as this might be required as well as obtaining necessary equipment and furnishings. Training will be required for new student caregivers as well as senior citizens.

With a well functioning child care center on campus, students will have the full opportunity to exploit their educational options. The value and convenience of such a day care center on campus cannot be argued. Affordable quality child care is being sought all over the world. We have the opportunity to provide our community with such an institution. Why should we waste our resources?

Thank you very much for taking the time to read my proposal. I would like to invite you to my oral presentation on this topic on Tuesday, March 27<sup>th</sup> at 3 p.m. in Beck 201 on the Livingston Campus in Piscataway. If you have any questions regarding my proposal please feel free to contact me anytime at (732) 555-0678. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

{Name withheld by request}

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