

*Babysitting blues:***For many, campus child care remains an issue**

by Vicky Snyder
The Collegian

Becky rushes in and quietly tries to unzip her coat and find a seat in the packed Psych 201 class. She glances at the clock on the wall; it's 9:35. Instead of taking notes, she finds herself jotting down a new day care schedule. "Pick Kirsten up at 11:00. Take her to the sitter. Ask Dad if he can watch Carly next week."

Students start to shuffle their books, signaling the end of class. She stares at the near-blank piece of paper in front of her. A knot begins to form in the pit of her stomach as she explains to the professor why she was late and why she may continue to be late.

Becky is just one of the many Behrend students and faculty who, in order to concentrate on academics, must delicately juggle an ever-changing day care arrangement.

The task begins at the start of each semester with the search for a quality sitter who is willing to deal with the erratic schedule of a college student on a budget. Unfortunately, there is not always an end to this quest.

If Becky had chosen to pursue her education at Mercyhurst, Edinboro University or the Villa Maria campus of Gannon University, she would have another option: an on-site campus day care program.

Mercyhurst has had an on-campus day care center for ten years. The Maura Smith Child Learning Center is a new building designed specifically for housing children.

Students, faculty, staff, and the community are welcome to use the facility. A flat rate of \$80 a week is charged to parents of children who attend the Learning Center. The cost of the Center is about one-tenth of what Behrend spent on the three new residence halls and stair tower last year, according to figures released in September of 1991 by the Department of Development and University Relations.

Two years ago, Edinboro University's campus day care center fell under university control. Housed with the Miller School Laboratory, it handles fifty-eight children of students. The center is open from 7:15 until 5:15 daily and charges various rates according to the age of the child and the schedule of the student.

Julia George, director of day care at Villa Maria of Gannon University, believes on-site day



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"Honey, I brought the kids": Without adequate day care facilities, some student/parents, facing haphazard schedules and tight budgets, are left with few options.

care programs are an asset to universities.

"If the program is beneficial to the students; if it meets their needs, enrollment could increase," she explained.

Villa's thirteen-year-old day care program is open to regular staff and students who pay according to the age of the child and the amount of time the child

conducted a study of the child care centers throughout the community in an attempt to find a way for Behrend to connect with an existing center. Due to the high demand for child care throughout the city, this effort failed.

The next step in the search for a solution was to look for a private company who would

turnover rates associated with the child care profession.

"We're proposing that it offer both full-time care and part-time care, or what we call flexible part-time care," Reber said. Students would schedule their classes for the semester while at the same time scheduling their child's care at the center. "What we don't want to have is

The construction costs of Mercyhurst's day care center were about one-tenth of what Behrend spent on the three new residence halls and stair tower last year.

spends in the center. The program is affiliated with the School of Education.

At Penn State, a university-wide survey of the day care needs of students, faculty and staff was conducted in 1989. Behrend came in third in the need for child care services, outranked only by University Park and the Harrisburg campus. However, both of these campuses now have on site child care facilities, making Behrend number one in need.

"The need is now recognized throughout the university," said Chris Reber, dean of Student Services.

A child care task force was set up at Behrend in 1989. Composed of students, faculty and staff members, the task force

build and operate a center on campus. According to Reber, this was a nationwide search. "We worked on a request for proposal which we ultimately sent to the nation's fifty largest child care providers." There were no takers.

The current effort has administrators looking for a building in the Behrend area which could house approximately 100 children; 25 infants, 15 toddlers and 60 preschoolers.

Reber noted that if the College finds a facility, the University will have complete control over it. Staff would be hired by the college, he added, which should ensure that quality individuals would be taking care of the children while hopefully reducing the unusually high

unannounced drop ins," he added.

If this hypothetical facility is found, the next concern would be funding. Behrend has requested start-up funds from the University in hopes that the center's fees will pay back the loan and allow it to be self-supporting within two years.

The average fees charged to students for full-time care would be \$80 per week for infants, \$75 dollars per week for toddlers and \$70 per week for preschoolers.

Community residents would be charged the most for use of the center, with students paying the lowest rates and faculty and staff in between. If a student wanted part-time care, the fees would be pro-rated according to how many hours the child spends at the center. For a slightly higher rate,

lunch and two snacks could be provided.

"I think everything looks very good," Reber explained. "However, we are asking the University to provide start-up funds; that would be breaking new ground. The University has never before made this kind of initial investment in child care."

"The reason that I am concerned is that we are in a difficult budget environment right now." There is support from some at University Park, he added, but the bureaucracy is moving slowly.

Those words were echoed by State Senator Buzz Andrezeski of the 49th district. Andrezeski does support on-site day care centers, but is concerned with the current education budget crunch in Harrisburg. The most current legislation on the floor which could benefit campus day care programs is a proposed tax break for parents who use child care services.

Meanwhile, the hectic life for student-parents at Behrend goes on.

"I have to get up, be out the door by 8:00 a.m. and be at school for a 9:00 a.m. class," said Becky Ohmer, a sixth semester psychology major. That might not be so bad, she said, "If I didn't have to drive all the way into town to the sitter's house and back out to Behrend everyday."

Ohmer has another child in school, which makes her timetable even tougher. "I have classes in the morning, work study in the afternoon and then the rush starts again when I have to go back into town, pick up Kirsten, and rush home to get Carly off the school bus."

Jackie Steele is pregnant with her third child. Although the other two are teenagers, she feels she may be in need of day care soon.

"I think it would be an extra bonus for students if they felt comfortable and secure about the facility," said the sixth semester communication major. "Price would definitely be a factor, because if you're in college full-time, you're probably not working."

All that these students can hope for is that the University keeps working on this problem. The need is there, the will seems to be there, and now the question is, will the funding be there? Nobody can predict the future, but in this case a lot of students want to picture a quality child care system for their children and for themselves.

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