

PREVENTIVE WORK WITH PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS: FOSTER FAMILY DAY CARE *

by BERTEL GORDON

*Administrative Supervisor, Foster Family Day Care Service,
Jewish Child Care Association, New York*

Inception of Foster Family Day Care

A VIEW of the social and economic scene reflects the familiar uptrend in women's employment which precipitated the growth and development of day care needs and of day care programs. Statistics on the increasing employment of women bear out the necessity for growing concern with good day care facilities and underline the need for providing supervision and guidance for young children. Of the 22 million women now working, about 3 million have children under 6. Another 4½ million have school age children between 6 and 17.

With the acceptance of the phenomenon of the working mother, the necessity to provide standards for proper care and service to children in order to meet their developmental needs has begun to move into the foreground. Whereas, at first, the primary emphasis had been to meet the manpower shortage by employing women, and plans for children's care had been makeshift, efforts and concern have gradually shifted to the promotion of good day care programs and the safeguarding of the young child at a critical stage of his development.

It was, therefore, appropriate that one

of the reasons for planning the First National Conference for children, an unprecedented event, which took place in Washington, D. C., in November 1960, was the concern for the growing nationwide need for proper services for children whose mothers for various reasons could not take care of them during the day. Recognition was accorded the tremendous opportunities in this field for improving nation-wide well-being since properly administered day care for children can provide a live setting for observation, diagnosis and treatment of the individual child's needs as well as an opportunity for helping parents with intrafamilial relationships or child care problems in a complicated urban society. With the increase of emotional and social problems among our clients, we have come to recognize the need for long range planning and greater community responsibility for sound child care programs and the preservation of stable family living.

Our Foster Family Day Care Service in New York City is a comparatively new program for children. The object of this service is to serve a group of parents who validly need day care for their children under three years of age. This program has functioned frequently as a supplement to existing foster home services and group care facilities for Jewish children.

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Atlantic City, New Jersey, June 3, 1962.

Our Family Day Care Service was initiated as a joint project of the Jewish Child Care Association of New York, Jewish Youth Services of Brooklyn (since merged with JCCA), and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in the fall of 1952. The recommendation for this service, the first of its kind in New York City, grew out of the growing number of requests for day care service for children of working mothers, from the ages of 8 months to 3 years. The New York Jewish Child Care Council, a coordinating agency no longer in existence, had been unable to refer any resources to mothers of very young children who for varied reasons were unable to care for their children during the daytime. By pinpointing the need for such service, the Council stimulated the initiation of an experimental program.

The Foster Family Day Care project was originally set up as a two-year pilot project. However, the operation of the program led to the unanimous conviction that family day care service was a valid preventive child care program and a needed one in the community and should be continued. In 1956, an additional sponsor, the Eisman Day Nursery, joined the Jewish Child Care Association and the Jewish Youth Services of Brooklyn. The program, originally set up to serve 15 children has since been expanded to serve from 60 to 65 children in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

In New York City, the publicly subsidized day care program offers group care to children from 3 years up. The need for supervised day care in a family setting for the very young child who could not or should not be absorbed in group care has come to be increasingly recognized, as have the dangers of haphazard independent placement with substandard arrangements. Since many parents find it necessary to place their children away from home for the day, the proper protection and the most suit-

able arrangement for these children's care has become an important consideration for the child care field.

Aims of Service—A Case Illustration

In our program of family day care, service is given where the use of day care is seen as beneficial to the child and as strengthening to the family unit. Most requests for day care placement are made on the basis of economic need. Marital discord, threatened family breakdowns, psychiatric needs and others, are, however, pervasive phenomena. The period of the child's day care placement has in many instances been utilized to work with the parents towards some insight into their fundamental problems and some resolution of them. Often there has been subsequent referral to a family agency.

In working with the child's family, the emphasis, wherever possible, is on helping to strengthen family life and to develop the parents' ability to fulfill their parental responsibilities. Many mothers, of course, apply for Foster Family Day Care Service when their marriage has already been broken up or dissolved. But with those families which are still intact, though shaky and confused, we work towards strengthening their ties to each other, even while the child is out of the home, and in that way helping to sustain the family unity.

The care of the Walter family is an illustration of family day care service which set a basis for healthy growth for the child and better, more stable parent adaptation.

Mrs. Walter, an attractive, very young mother, age 22, requested day care service for her daughter, Paula, age 2½, to permit Mrs. Walter to go to work and in that way enable her husband, who had recently been discharged from the Army, to pursue his vocational training as a photographer while working on a part-time basis. In the intake process, it was revealed that Mrs. Walter had previously contacted the placement agency

for full care placement of the child but had withdrawn when she realized that she did not want total separation.

We learned that Mrs. Walter had had a difficult childhood, rejected by her mother and hated by her stepfather. She had gone through many traumatic experiences, from early infancy evidently presenting problems to her own infantile, punitive mother. At the age of 14, Mrs. Walter had been admitted to an institution for delinquent children where she remained for three years. It was there that she met her husband whom she married upon her discharge from that school against the advice of the institution authorities. According to reports from that institution, both Mr. and Mrs. Walter had made good social adjustments at the school and left much improved.

At the point of application for day care for Paula, both Mr. and Mrs. Walter revealed their deep disturbance over the outlook of their marriage. The Walters had had a stormy marriage from the beginning, with many separations and reconciliations. Paula's birth was unplanned and the young couple was totally unprepared for the baby. Mrs. Walter presented many complaints over her husband's irresponsible behavior, his lack of interest in his family and their financial difficulties. Upon the suggestion of her social worker from the institution, remembering the help Mrs. Walter had received from her treatment there, she had contacted a family agency. However, beyond being referred to our agency, she had not seen a worker there. Both Mr. and Mrs. Walter had decided to "grow up and stay together." As a part of this plan, the Walters were asking for day care service as an opportunity to establish some financial security and also to work out their personal problems with each other and with their child.

During the Intake process, we recognized Mrs. Walter to be a confused, dramatic young woman with spurts of uncontrollable anger and a great need for attention. We found Mr. Walter, who as an adopted child, a more sober person with greater awareness of himself. Both parents evidenced their confusion and indecision when they applied to several agencies at once. Little Paula was a delicate little girl with blonde hair and a winsome face who called everybody "honey" when she wanted to get something from them. It was obvious that Mrs. Walter infantilized the child by feeding her, holding her in her arms and frequently giving in to her. There was, however, no doubt that the Walters had

warm feelings for their youngster and that Paula was very attached to her parents.

In accepting the Walters' request for day care placement of their child, we felt that sharing the care of little Paula with these burdened, immature parents would provide relief from the tensions and turmoils in their family, and would enable the couple to begin facing their own basic problems which were reflected in their relationship to their child.

Little Paula was placed in a day care home which we found in the vicinity of her own home, in which she remained for a period of a year. The day care mother, a former full-time foster mother for Jewish Youth Services, was known to us as a responsible, capable person, down to earth and with a real interest in children. We felt sure that we could trust this foster mother with undisciplined Paula and her confused home situation.

Introduction of a child into a new day care home is a careful, day-by-day process—so as to effect gradual transition from their own home as well as an opportunity for observation to the worker. During the period of Paula's day care placement, we continued to see Mrs. Walter regularly at least twice a month, and Mr. Walter as often as his busy schedule of part-time work and school hours would permit. Paula and her day care mother too, had to be visited more frequently in an effort to iron out inconsistencies of care arising from two different types of approaches and methods of handling the child. For instance, the foster mother's methods of toilet training, such as accompanying Paula to the bathroom and rewarding her with resounding applause in recognition of her readiness to use the toilet seat, were more effective than the mother's easy discouragement over Paula's refusal to respond to her expectations and demands. In the area of feeding, a balance was reached when Mrs. Walter came to realize that the child eagerly partook of her meals when her mother ate at the same time with the youngster. This was customary in the day care home, rather

than a separate ritual of Paula's meal-times.

In our role of supplementing and supporting the care the natural parents were able to give, we worked closely with the Walters in helping them recognize the day-by-day needs and experiences of their child—that is, toilet training, feeding habits, rest periods, cleanliness, and most important—standards and sustained interest in regular health services for Paula.

Work with the day care mother centered mainly around harmonizing some of the differences described above in Paula's care and in tempering some of the foster mother's criticism of Mrs. Walter whom she found more fond of herself than of the child. The foster mother worked easily with the agency and could accept our explanation that these young parents, beginning their married life together, were finding it difficult to be model parents at the same time. Certainly her love and devotion for little Paula helped the foster mother to continue with her consistent care and patient approach through the year that Paula spent in the day care home.

Paula developed quite well as time went on in her day care placement. From a shy, whimpering little girl, she began to grow into a more independent, self-assertive youngster who made quite a place for herself in her even-tempered, relaxed day care home. Physically, Paula made remarkable strides, with the help of regular food habits, the use of vitamins and much needed dental care, obviously neglected thus far. Though at first threatened by the competent care of the day care mother, Mrs. Walter was able to use the help and direction given her and followed through the child's needs and requirements at home. Her fears and anxieties around Paula's earlier withdrawn behavior and frail health were allayed by the obvious improvement in the child's development.

In the process of helping the Walters as parents, we worked with them simultaneously on helping them to sustain their family life and in facing their personal problems.

Mrs. Walter was prone to hysterical outbursts when her demands upon her husband remained unfulfilled. Mr. Walter, though confessing his urgent desire to make good and establish a better life for his child and family, constantly threatened to leave home whenever a crisis arose. Both used the early part of their interviews in our office to blow off steam and seek support.

Though it was difficult to find a focus in working with these rash and immature, seemingly self-centered young people, we began by helping the Walters to develop awareness of their erratic behavior which not only affected Paula but also disturbed their mutual relations. We worked with them on practical solutions to their frequent job problems and quarrels around the use of money. We encouraged Mrs. Walter to engage in a switchboard operator and receptionist course so that some job security could be established for her and a more stable income for the family.

Throughout, we worked with the young couple in helping them cement their relationship to each other. As we continued to see Mrs. Walter regularly during the period of Paula's day care placement, she was able to use the time spent in my office to focus more specifically on her real problems. We helped Mrs. Walter to a gradual recognition that she was not really a bad girl as her family had made her believe, but rather the victim of her own unfortunate family situation. This gave her some awareness of the nature of her disturbed behavior and her part in the marital conflict. Following many stormy sessions in the office and numerous telephoned demands and complaints, Mrs. Walter began steadily to respond to the support and guidance

given her and revealed a good deal of inner strength. Unfortunately, because of his work and school schedule, Mr. Walter could not be seen as frequently as was felt necessary, but during the time he was available, he showed genuine interest in involving himself with the worker.

Though we had long recognized the need for family counselling for the Walters, particularly since day care service was necessarily limited by Paula's eventual admission to a group care center, the couple could not be mobilized for this transfer until a crisis arose. The family was being threatened with a dispossession for non-payment of rent. Only then did they accept our referral to the family agency where they were seen immediately and help in rent payment was arranged.

By the time Paula was ready for the day care center, and through the concrete help of financial assistance offered by the family agency, the Walters finally were ready for transfer to them. Whenever the Walters felt the need for counselling help, they were seen by the family agency and steadily moved towards greater understanding of their own problems.

Although Paula was now accepted by the Day Care Center, and the Walters were being seen by the family service, we remained in the situation for a period of six weeks after the child had actually left her day care home. It was recognized that Paula might have difficulty in her early adjustment period, and so the group care center had asked us to stand by—with which we were in accord.

In evaluating the effectiveness of the service given little Paula and her parents, which encompassed supervision of the child's placement adjustment in the day care home and work with the parents who gradually revealed their numerous stresses and problems, we provided the youngster with an environment for

wholesome growth and development which enabled strengthening of her ego. Simultaneously, in working with the couple who had become parents prematurely, we helped support them in their roles as parents, and in that way safeguarded the strength that did exist in their relationship to each other but which was being submerged. By relieving some of the tension in this unstable family constellation, we gave the Walters the opportunity to recognize their basic problems more fundamentally and to begin to work on them.

Service to a Broken Family—Larry S

Family Day Care is seen as a valid service to a mother, whose marriage has already broken up, in helping her to achieve her role as a parent in an uneasy relationship with her child.

Little Larry S, 2½ years of age, was a youngster accepted for day care placement to help relieve his overwrought mother of the burden of his full care and at the same time give her an opportunity to work and supplement the small income from her ex-husband's allowance. Mrs. S had been divorced four months before and was beset with her own problems of doubt, sense of failure and inadequacies which were reflected in her uneasy relationship with the child.

Mrs. S was an intelligent, sensitive person, depressed over the failures in her life and overwhelmed with her seeming inability to handle her child. Her confusion in relation to Larry, who was well able to exploit his mother's emotional turmoil and inconsistent pattern, was most evident. During the interview sessions with the caseworker, Mrs. S was able to express her ambivalence over the strong attachment to her father from whom she was receiving occasional financial help and her resentment towards him for not taking sides against her stepmother with whom she was in competition. We were able to help Mrs. S begin to recognize her part in the constant struggle between her dependency needs and her resentment over the loss of her independence and the subsequent right to make her own decisions.

In the day care home environment, little Larry, a bright but rather undisciplined and strongwilled youngster, developed noticeably

well and was making a very rapid adjustment. Throughout the period of service to Larry, Mrs. S had regularly scheduled interviews with the caseworker and was given support and guidance in regard to her difficulties with the child's feeding habits, refusal to nap, his constant whimpering and temper out-breaks. Initially Mrs. S had shown surprise as well as resentment over the youngster's easy adjustment in the day care home which was a further threat to her own feeling of adequacy. However, in a short time and with help, she could respond to the realization that in her own emotional loneliness and personal unhappiness, she had actually shied away from deeper involvement with the child to which the child had reacted with stubborn resistance and excessive demands.

The beginning of a growing confidence in her responsibility as a mother and her capacity to sustain it was reflected in Mrs. S's readiness to take over Larry's care at home when he developed a severe cold, without calling in neighbors or relatives which previously she had been accustomed to doing.

Meanwhile, Mrs. S was free to obtain a job and after a short adjustment period was able to settle down and appeared to derive a good deal of satisfaction and stimulation from her work. The realization that she could trust herself to carry on with her job and slowly begin to cope with the care of her child as well, contributed a great deal to developing faith in herself.

At the end of the eight-month placement period, Larry was ready for transfer to a group care setting where he could be with other children of his age. As part of this plan, and in view of the foreseeable termination of our service, we had focussed on goals for ongoing help to Mrs. S as well and had acquainted her with the possibility of continuing to work with a family counselling agency. For two months after Larry was placed in the day care center, we continued to see Mrs. S regularly to sustain the gains made around her acceptance of further help until the counselling agency was able to work with her.

Mrs. S was heartened by the experience of day care placement which had helped her assume her parental role and had served to strengthen her ties to her child. It was evident, too, that the success of her work plans contributed to her greater strength in making decisions without the critical and often devastating advice from her family. Mrs. S was now able to accept transfer to a family

agency for counselling, with which she has continued.

Service to Adequate Families

In our experience with the Foster Family Day Care Service, most requests for day care placement were brought to us by people beset with social and personal problems. There is, however, a small group of applicants, self-maintaining young people, who also need the help of day care service as a means of solving a realistic dilemma. For example, the Mann family applied to us for day care service for their fifteen-month-old son to enable the young father to pursue his training as a rabbinical student and the mother to work and support the family during this time. While little Sammy developed further and was a delightful happy youngster in the day care home, the parents responded eagerly to directions given them when they unfolded their apparent disparities in disciplining the child and inconsistency in the youngster's care, evidences of which were reflected in the day care home. Moreover, sparked by the shift in roles, some feeling of resentment about added responsibilities was displayed by the mother resulting in beginning uneasy relationship to her husband. Through the concrete service of day care for the child and within the framework of case-work help, even this self-directing couple was offered an opportunity to bring to the fore some hidden confusion and to work on putting into proper perspective their real aims and future goals.

Conclusion: Growing Support for Foster Family Day Care

In our work with pre-school children and their families, preventive values such as averting complete family breakup, full time placement or public assistance, have been significant factors. As illustrated in the cases, families coming for the specific service of day care show

various intrafamilial difficulties and emotional imbalances in addition to the economic need, which are not sufficiently evident or accepted by them to turn to a family agency for their problems. There is no question that they need help. In offering foster day care service, we have often been able to utilize the placement period to reach them at an early stage in their being as a family, and within the framework of casework help, to prevent drastic family tragedies.

It is to be noted that as a concrete manifestation of increasing nationwide recognition of the value and significance of day care in the gamut of child welfare services, efforts have at last been made by the federal government to include provisions for group and family day care programs in recent legislation and to participate in the development of such programs. The bill, H.R. 10606, recently submitted by Mr. Mills of the Ways and Means Committee, proposed an appropriation of \$5,000,000 for the first year and \$10,000,000 in subsequent years for children of working mothers. The bill has already passed the House of Representatives and is presently before the Senate for approval. This bill emphasizes the increasing acceptance of legislative responsibility for proper day care services in the nation.¹ In New York City, too, interest and support for such programs have made

¹ Although this bill was later signed by the president, Congress has to the date of this publication failed to make fiscal appropriation to implement the bill.

strides in the past year, and currently funds to initiate a city-sponsored foster family day care program to meet the need of the very young children have been appropriated as requested by Welfare Commissioner Dumpson.

It seems fitting to mention here that after 10 years of operation, our Foster Family Day Care Service in New York has undertaken a review and follow-up study of the program to evaluate the services given to clients over a period of time. Although the group closely connected with the service, both professional and board members, have over the years developed wholehearted conviction as to the validity and benefits of the program, it seemed appropriate to explore with the families what help they felt they had derived. We hope to be able to utilize the results of our study both for ourselves in our further development of the program and to evoke more interest in such service and stimulate its development for other groups in New York.

We are especially interested in making known the achievement of our program at this time when there has been an upsurge of public interest and significant legislative proposals in the day care field. We feel that family day care offers an important opportunity to help young families with small children towards developing some insight into various segments of their problems and thus contribute to the prevention of family breakdown and greater tragedies for their young children.