

Child care advocacy group to close [US] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A national advocacy organization created to warn of the "crisis" in child care is marking its 20th anniversary next month by closing its doors. Financial woes forced the decision to end operations at the Child Care Action Campaign, said Faith Wohl, the CCAC's president for the past five years.

The past two years were "very tough" financially, she said. After September 11, "we saw our revenues, like many New York nonprofits, really plunge." The recession further hampered CCAC fund-raising efforts.

Data from charity-watcher Guidestar show that although the \$1.1 million CCAC was financially healthy through the middle of 2000, it lost money in 2001 and 2002. The CCAC also had reached a crossroads in its mission, Ms. Wohl said. The campaign was founded in 1983 by philanthropist Elinor Guggenheimer, because, in her words, "there's a crisis in child care and we've got to get the word out," said Ms. Wohl.

"In December, our board of directors concluded that the work we set out to do, which was to build national awareness of the crisis in child care, had in a sense come to an end," she said. But as board members discussed new directions for the campaign, it became apparent it would be difficult to start a new mission, given the fierce competition for child care funds.

"So we decided to declare victory on the awareness mission and close," said Ms. Wohl. There are already offers to take over some CCAC projects and the group's 12 employees are job hunting, she said, adding that she will be ready to work on new child care projects later this year.

Margy Waller, a child care specialist at Brookings Institution, lamented CCAC's closing. "My first reaction was, 'What horrendous timing,' because here we are, in the midst of the reauthorization of the federal child care block grant," she said.

"CCAC is closing its doors, but has much to celebrate," Children's Defense Fund child care director Helen Blank wrote in the CCAC's farewell newsletter, which is being mailed this week. "It is incumbent on all of us to now continue to oppose short-sighted fiscal policies" of the Bush administration, Ms. Blank said.

In Congress, a House welfare bill adds \$2 billion to \$4.8 billion spent on child care and allows states to transfer half their welfare funds to child care. The Senate Finance Committee hasn't produced its welfare bill, but some committee members want to see child care funds reach \$11 billion a year.

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