

Rural Child Care in Ontario

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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THE NEED FOR CHILD CARE IN RURAL AREAS

In rural Ontario in 1991 there were:

- 282,747 children 0-9 years; and
- an estimated 73,565 women with at least one child under age 7 working outside the home.

In addition to parents working outside the home, self-employed families, such as farmers and tourist operators, have both parents working full-time on the home work site for at least part of the year. A situation in which a stay-at-home mother is available to care for the children is no longer a reality for many rural families.

RURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD CARE

Rural communities are characterized by:

- seasonal variation as a predominant work pattern;
- fluctuations in the need for child care from year to year;
- a scattered population with relatively few users for any one type of service;
- long travel distances and lack of public transportation;
- the presence of commuters who live in rural areas but work in a town or city and drive long distances to work each day; and
- the presence of stay-at-home parents who may be without a car all day.

As a result of these characteristics:

- rural communities require a variety of kinds of child care including: a) child care on a year-round, full-time basis; b) seasonal child care; c) child care offered outside usual working hours of 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.; and d) child care on a periodic basis (for example, to cover an emergency);
- communities can only sustain small child care programs; and
- child care programs must be able to identify and respond to changes in need quickly.

EXPERIENCE IN ONTARIO WITH THE PROVISION OF RURAL CHILD CARE

Organizations which appear to be providing a range of services successfully to meet the child care needs of their rural community are characterized by:

- flexibility in the way they provide services and willingness to change as needs change;
- creativity in their use of resources and in obtaining resources;
- adequate resources;

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- gradual development using a phased-in approach. Several successful organizations began with a child care resource centre. This enabled the staff to gain an understanding of the community and the people in the community to get to know the organization. Then, the organization began developing other services such as regulated home child care;
- ongoing marketing of service. Currently, child care is primarily funded through parent fees. Since there is a relatively small potential number of users in a rural community, it is important to ensure that all of them know about the service; and
- strong support from Ministry of Community and Social Services field staff who are willing to encourage innovative approaches.

The needs for child care can be met in a variety of ways. For example, in Ontario communities, the need for seasonal child care is currently met through: a) the provision of care in the child's own home; b) child care centres which operate only during the summer; c) year-round centre-based programs which supplement their staff during the summer so that they can care for additional children; and d) regulated home child care.

Ontario experience with rural child care centres, rural regulated home child care, and the provision of child care in the child's own home, is reviewed in this paper and issues to consider are identified for each approach (see chapters IV, V, and VI). All three approaches share the challenge of ensuring financial viability. Rural child care centres face specific issues related to their small size and regulated home child care faces challenges obtaining sufficient caregivers. Nevertheless, some rural communities are successfully operating child care centres and regulated home child care in rural settings. Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Québec have experience with the provision of child care in the child's own home. All three provinces have experienced concerns about the cost of such care related to the number of children served, potential liability, (since care is provided in an unregulated home) and high caregiver turnover rates.

QUALITY

Quality child care is child care which:

- supports and assists the child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual well-being and development; and
- supports the family in its child rearing role.

Quality in child care for preschoolers matters because of:

- the known negative impact of child care which is poor quality on the child's development while in child care, adjustment to school, and academic performance in school; and
- the apparent inability of a positive home environment to compensate fully for poor quality non-parental care used on a full-time basis.

Research has shown that:

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- centre-based caregivers who have formal training at a post secondary level in child development or the provision of child care are more likely to know what is realistic to expect from a child at a given age, how to respond appropriately to the child's needs, and how to provide the child with the type of stimulation that will assist the child's development;
- centre-based caregivers who are responsible for only a few children are more responsive to the children than caregivers who are responsible for larger groups. They also spend a higher proportion of their time providing the children with activities;
- centre-based caregivers who are working in space which is safe and designed for children are less likely to restrict the children than are caregivers working in unsafe environments;
- centre-based caregivers who are paid adequate salaries are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and less likely to be harsh with the children for whom they are responsible; and
- home child care caregivers are more likely to provide better care if they have training in child care and are regulated.

The provision of quality child care in a situation of a small population base and a variety of different needs is a major challenge for rural communities.

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This paper was prepared for a conference on rural child care sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. It provides an overview of the issues related to the provision of child care in rural areas and information about what has been learned from experience in rural child care provision. The 1992 Ministry of Community and Social Services' consultation document ***Setting the stage: Child care reform in Ontario*** set out the government's vision for child care reform and expansion of child care in rural areas. It is hoped that this paper will assist participants at the Rural Child Care Conference in their deliberations which, in turn, will suggest directions for government policy development and legislative reform.

A DEFINITION OF CHILD CARE

This paper uses the following definition of child care:

Child care involves children age 0-12 years outside regular school hours and includes both:

- ***services such as: child care centres, nursery schools, care in a provider's home, care by a non-relative in the child's own home, and periodic care provided through a child care resource centre; and***
- ***supports to the family including: toy and equipment lending libraries, registries of local child care providers, and parent education opportunities.***

WHEN IS A COMMUNITY DEFINED AS RURAL?

Statistics Canada defines a RURAL area as one which has:

- ***attained a population concentration of less than 1,000 people; and***
- ***has a population density of less than 400 people per square kilometre.***

For the purposes of this paper, remote communities that are only accessible by air or rail are not included in the discussion of child care needs and possible delivery approaches. These communities have their own unique characteristics and needs which are beyond the scope of this exercise. For similar reasons, child care in reserve communities is not discussed.

RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE 1990'S

The traditional view of rural Ontario is a farming or small mill or mining community with stay-at-home mothers or grandmothers available to care for the children. The current reality is quite different. Twelve rural child care need assessment studies done within the past five years were reviewed for this report. These studies made it evident that:

- **increasing numbers of farm families have one spouse engaged in paid work off the farm** while the other is fully engaged during the day in farm tasks. Statistics Canada reports that in 1990, 14,850 Ontario farms with two operators had one of the persons employed in paid off-farm work for 190 days or more during the year. An additional 6,685 had one of the two people in paid off-farm employment for 60 days or more during the year (Statistics Canada, 1991).
- **tourism in rural communities has become a major economic activity in some areas** and may be seasonal or year-round;
- in some parts of the province, **young families have moved into rural areas from cities** seeking affordable homes or a different lifestyle. They may be dual-earner families where both parents commute long distances to work (often in a town or city) or single-earner families where one parent stays at home with the children, often without the use of a car all day;
- **women may be employed locally, sometimes doing shift work** in a health care facility or small industry. Many of these women have young children; and
- **there is often no extended family nearby** to assist with child care. Where extended families live locally, grandparents may be operating their own farms or tourist businesses. Cooperative child care arrangements among neighbours who are self-employed are impractical except on an occasional basis since all farms or tourist operations in an area are likely to be busy at the same time.

Rural residents whose workplace and home are on the same site, such as farmers and self-employed tourist operators, share a concern for the safety of their children while they work. For farmers, the concern revolves around things such as heavy machinery and pesticides. According to the Ontario Farm Safety Association, between 1982 and 1992, there were 65 farm work-related fatalities involving children under age 15. Of these, 33 involved children under age five (Farm Safety Association Inc., 1993). Parents operating restaurants worry about children being burned with hot fat or scalded with boiling water. Marina operators have to be concerned about winches for lifting boats and other machinery, gasoline pumps, and varnish and paints in easily openable containers. Statistics for injuries to non-farm rural children are not available.

The following hypothetical situations illustrate some of the realities of rural communities in the 1990's.

Ian and Joan found they couldn't afford a house in or near Metropolitan Toronto where they both had good jobs. Therefore, they moved into a rural area near a village north of Toronto. They have two children. Zak is four and Andrea is 18 months old. After the move, Joan continued with her job in Toronto. This meant either relying on GO transit, which had only one train in the morning and one in the evening, or driving. Ian and Joan opted to drive. Ian could not always precisely predict when he would be able to leave work so being tied to the GO train schedule could have caused problems. By asking around in the village, they were able to find a home child care provider who was prepared to look after the children for extended hours. However, after a few months she announced that she had taken a job where she could earn more money working fewer hours. The local child care centre only

provided care between 8.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. so Joan tried to find another full-time home child care provider. She interviewed a couple of women who had advertisements in the grocery store. In one case, she felt the caregiver was already looking after too many children. In the other case, Joan disagreed with the woman's ideas on discipline. Because she could not get what she considered to be suitable child care, Joan decided to stop working. Not only was the family's income cut almost in half but Joan now stays at home with the two children. There are no other houses where someone is home during the day within easy walking distance. Joan is finding it very stressful to be alone all day in an isolated situation with two active preschoolers and no car. She is also worried about the fact that the children have no age-mates to play with.

Alex and Maggie operate a small farm. They have three children. Eric is nine, Peter is seven and Karen is six. Maggie works as a bookkeeper in the local village five mornings a week in order to provide a small steady income for the family. She also helps run the farm. Finally having all three children in school all day has reduced the need for child care. However, often when the children come home from school there is work which must to be done in the barn or the fields. Maggie and Alex have both found that if the children are with them while they work they can neither supervise them fully nor pay adequate attention to the task at hand. They both realize that this is how accidents happen. Therefore, instead of taking the children with them when they do chores, Alex and Maggie leave them playing unsupervised in the yard or house. Eric is a responsible boy who tries to look after his brother and sister but they don't always listen to him. Instead of babysitting, Eric would much rather be helping with the chores. Involving him in the farm work is tempting since the extra pair of hands is badly needed. Harvesting is a particularly difficult period. Since they can't afford a hired hand, Alex and Maggie have to do the work themselves. Eric has been nagging his father to allow him to help this year. His parents are worried that he might have an accident or that Peter or Karen might get hurt if Eric is not keeping an eye on them while Alex and Maggie work.¹

After years of shift work and saving, Lee finally realized his dream of having his own business in his new country. He and his wife Mei have taken over an existing Chinese restaurant in a small village in a popular tourist area. Since it is the only restaurant in the immediate area, it is busy in the summer tourist and the fall hunting seasons. Lee and Mei have two small daughters. Annie is nearly four and Elizabeth is almost two. The family lives in an apartment above the restaurant. Lee has been able to hire local women as waitresses. However, he is not satisfied with their cooking skills so he and Mei work in the kitchen. Now that Elizabeth is walking, it is very difficult to supervise both children and work. There is a local child care centre but it doesn't accept children younger than 2½. Its fees are much too expensive for them too, so Lee and Mei hired a high school student during the summer to look after the girls. However, the student got bored playing with the children and sometimes got engrossed watching T.V. One day Annie came running into the kitchen and bumped into Mei while she was pouring hot fat out of a pan. Annie was splashed on the arm with the fat and now has a bad scar.

THE NEED FOR CHILD CARE IN RURAL AREAS

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According to the 1991 Census:

- ***80,979 children age 0-9 lived in metro fringe communities (rural areas which are socially and economically integrated into an urban centre with a population of 100,000 or more);***
- ***35,725 children age 0-9 lived in city fringe communities (rural areas which are socially and economically integrated into an urban centre with a population of 10,000 to 99,999); and***
- ***166,040 children age 0-9 lived in isolated rural areas (areas which are not integrated into an urban area of 10,000 or more).***

TOTAL = 282,747 children age 0-9 living in rural Ontario²

In 1991/92, in Ontario RURAL areas and communities with less than 2,500 people contained:

- ***an estimated 44,200 women with at least one child under age seven were employed outside the home on a primarily full-time basis; and***
- ***an estimated 29,365 such women were working outside the home on a part-time basis.***

TOTAL = 73,565 women with at least one child under age seven working outside the home.³

Additional information on the number of children in rural areas and workforce participation by rural parents is provided in Appendix B.

In addition to being required to provide care for children while parents work outside the home, child care is needed to:

- enable parents to take advantage of job training and education opportunities;
- care for children, especially to provide for child safety in situations where family-operated businesses which operate on the same site as the home while the parent is engaged in work tasks;
- provide social experiences for children, especially those living in isolated rural areas, to assist them to develop skills in relating to other children;
- provide care in emergency situations, for example, when a parent is hospitalized; and
- enable a stay-at-home parent to attend a medical appointment, to simply have a break or to provide early childhood education for the children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD CARE PROVISION

It is clear that there are a substantial number of children in rural communities whose parents work or who require child care for other reasons. Due to differences in lifestyles among families in the same rural area, parents within the same community may require child care which is available:

- **on a full-time year-round basis**, for example, non-farm rural commuters and farm parents who work off-farm on a full-time basis;
- **on a seasonal basis**, for example, farm parents who do not work off the farm but face busy periods at planting and harvesting, seasonal tourist operators, and people engaged in logging;
- **outside usual working hours**, for example, parents who work shifts or commute long distances and may leave at 6.00 a.m. and not return till 7.00 p.m.; and
- **on a periodic basis**, for example, for an emergency when the usual caregiver is unavailable or to allow a stay-at-home parent to have a break or attend a medical appointment.

In rural communities (like urban areas and towns), it is quite common for people in one community to have several or all of the above needs.

ENDNOTES

1. A national survey by the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada in 1990 estimated that 40% of farm children under the age of ten are left unattended while the parent works on the farm or are taken along with the parent as farm tasks are done.
2. From data prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada's 1991 Census data.
3. From data prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada's *Survey of Consumer Finances* microdata. This annual survey contains approximately 11,000 respondents from Ontario of whom approximately 20% have a child under age seven. Data from 1991 and 1992 were aggregated in order to increase the sample size. The term "primarily" refers to situations where the person generally worked full-time.

CHAPTER II - THE CONTEXT OF CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides information on the roles of the three levels of government, the three major issues in child care, and child care reform in Ontario.

THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

The federal government

Canada does not have a national child care policy nor national child care legislation. Responsibility for the provision of child care services rests with the provinces and territories. However, the federal government shapes the development and availability of child care through several funding mechanisms including:

- cost-sharing eligible child care expenditures with the provincial and territorial governments (this cost-sharing is intended for fee subsidization for low income parents);
- assisting some parents with part of the cost of child care through income tax deductions; and
- provision of dependent care allowances which can be used by trainees in job training programs sponsored by the federal government to purchase child care.

The provincial government

The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services is currently responsible for:

- child care legislation, regulation, and licensing;
- child care policy development;
- provision of 30% of the cost of parent fee subsidization; and
- provision of direct program funding to regulated non-profit centre-based and home-based child care programs.

Junior and senior kindergarten, which serve children age four and five respectively, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Training.

The municipal government

The Ontario *Day Nurseries Act* enables, but does not require, municipalities to:

- directly operate child care centres and regulated home child care programs;
- administer a parent fee subsidization program (in which case, the municipality contributes 20% of the cost).

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Because municipal involvement in child care is voluntary, there is considerable variation in the roles of municipalities across the province.¹

THE MAJOR ISSUES IN CHILD CARE

Generally, the major issues in child care can be categorized into three areas. These are availability, affordability, and quality.

Availability

Availability in child care refers to whether there is an appropriate space to match the parent's and child's needs. The child care needs of individual parents are determined by factors such as:

- their reason for wanting child care;
- their work patterns and the resultant hours of child care required;
- their income and fixed expenses, such as mortgage payments; and
- the age and developmental level of their children.

A match between parent needs and child care availability depends upon whether there is an available space for a child of the right age, in a location which is reasonably close to the parent's home or place of work, with hours of operation which match those required by the parent, at a price the parent can afford, and which meets the developmental needs of the child. If one of these factors is not a match, then child care cannot be considered available for that child. (See Appendix C for additional information on the availability of child care in Ontario.)

Affordability

Affordability refers to the parents' ability to pay for child care.

The proportion of parental income required to purchase child care

The following facts determine the extent to which child care is affordable:

- In 1993, across the province as a whole, fees in licensed non-profit centres ranged between \$4,000.00 to \$10,291.00 a year depending on the child's age.
- In 1993, the fees in rural regulated home child care ranged between \$4,959.00 to \$6,525.00 a year, again depending on the child's age.
- In 1992, an estimated 52.3% of rural families with at least one child under age 12 had an after-tax family income of less than \$40,000.00. Twenty-six percent of rural families with at least one child under age 12 had an after-tax family income of less than \$30,000.00.²

Practically, this means that a family earning \$35,000 a year with two preschool children would be paying (a minimum) of \$8,000 a year, or 23% of their income for regulated child care. A family earning \$50,000 a year, with an infant and a preschool child, could be paying \$15,000 a year, or 30% of their annual income for regulated child care.

It should be noted that many families with at least one child under age 12 would have more than one child under this age. The above figures suggest that a substantial number of rural families could only afford child care if they could obtain a fee subsidy.

Issues associated with the current approach to fee subsidization

In Ontario, municipalities, approved corporations³ and Indian Bands currently administer the fee subsidy program and contribute 20% of the cost of subsidization. Parent eligibility is determined by a municipally-determined and administered needs test which considers income, assets and expenditures. Problems encountered by parents with the current mechanism for obtaining a fee subsidy include:

- **considerable variation from municipality to municipality** in: a) the maximum income permitted for subsidy eligibility; b) the maximum amount of subsidy granted; c) the presence or absence of a surcharge/fee (parental contribution to the cost of the child care); and, d) the amount of the surcharge/fee. This situation has resulted from the fact that municipal governments have considerable discretion (within broad provincial guidelines) in how the fee subsidy program is administered;
- **lack of a mechanism in some communities whereby parents can access fee subsidization.** This can occur when a local township council takes the position that child care should be the parents' responsibility, so declines to administer a fee subsidy program, or the community is in an unorganized territory and there is no municipal government. In such situations, if there is no non-profit child care agency willing to become an approved corporation, there is no route for accessing fee subsidization;
- **seasonal fluctuations in income** experienced by farmers, loggers, and tourist operators. At the time they are assessed for subsidy, they may have relatively large bank accounts. However, the money will be needed at a later time to buy seed or pay living expenses during the off-season when there is no income. Some municipalities include these temporary, relatively large sums of money as liquid assets and, on this basis, declare the person ineligible for subsidy; and
- **increases in surcharges** in the past couple of years by some municipalities struggling with the recession or a reduction in the amount of money allocated for child care. Many municipalities have waiting lists of eligible parents who cannot get a fee subsidy.

The real cost of unregulated child care

Unregulated care is often perceived to be less expensive than regulated care. However, in reality the fees charged by an unregulated provider may be the same as those charged by a neighbouring regulated home child care situation. Fee subsidization is not available in Ontario (or most provinces) to pay for unregulated care. The Ontario government has clearly stated its intention not to subsidize unregulated care because "it would be impossible to monitor the use of funds and the quality of services delivered" (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1991). Income tax deductions provide only limited relief to parents in regard to the cost of child care. In addition, parents require receipts to claim the Child Care Expense Deduction and many unregulated caregivers do not issue receipts.

In summary, because parents cannot get a fee subsidy and may not get an income tax receipt, unregulated child care may cost the parent more than regulated care. (Additional discussion on the issue of affordability is provided in Appendix D).

Quality

Quality child care is child care which:

- **supports and assists the child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual well-being and development; and**
- **supports the family in its child rearing role**

Why quality in child care matters

An estimated 73,565 women with at least one child under age seven living in rural areas and urban communities with a population under 2,500 were engaged in full- or part-time work outside the home⁴ in 1991/1992. Other rural parents, such as farmers, are engaged in work on the home site for considerable periods of time each day. The quality of the non-parental care children receive while the parents work matters because of:

- the known negative impact on children of poor quality care; and
- the apparent inability of a positive home environment to compensate fully for poor quality non-parental care used for preschoolers on a regular basis.

The research findings cited in the remainder of this section on quality come from a review of over 100 studies on child care conducted in the past 15 years (Doherty, 1991).

The impact of poor quality child care

When preschool children receiving poor quality child care are compared with age-mates receiving good quality child care they have been found to:

- be more anxious than their age-mates receiving high quality child care;
- have poorer social skills than their age mates;
- show more negative behaviours towards adults;
- have less well developed language skills; and
- have poorer problem-solving skills.

Research which has followed up children in elementary school has found that the negative impact of poor quality child care persists. Children who were in poor quality child care as preschoolers are more likely to have poor academic performance and difficulties getting along with school-mates.

The inability of the home to compensate for poor quality child care

Several studies have indicated that living in a stable middle-class family with parents who have at least high school education does not compensate for poor quality child care, at least for preschoolers in full-time attendance. For example, one study which controlled for differences in the

children's family backgrounds found that the quality of child care received by children enrolled as infants determined up to 22% of the differences found among the children's social skills at the end of kindergarten. Another study, which involved only middle-class families where both parents had at least a high school education, found that preschool-age children in poor quality child care had poorer language skills than their age-mates receiving good quality child care.

The key ingredients of quality child care

The key ingredients which determine quality in child care are: the behaviour of the caregiver with the child, the child environment, and the adult work environment.

The caregiver's behaviour with the child

The interaction between the caregiver and the child is the most important ingredient in quality child care. Research has indicated that caregivers with specific training in child development and child care provision are more likely than those without such training to know:

- what is appropriate to expect from a child at a given age and are therefore less likely to stress the child by unrealistic demands;
- how to respond appropriately to the child's needs; and
- how to provide the child with the type of stimulation that assists in social, language, and intellectual development.

They are also less likely to be harsh with the child. The importance of caregiver training has been demonstrated in both regulated home child care and centre-based care.

The child environment

The ability of the caregiver to provide quality care is directly influenced by the child environment. For example, research has shown that:

- caregivers responsible for small numbers of children in small groups are more responsive to the children's needs than those responsible for large numbers of children in larger groups. They also spend a higher proportion of their time providing the children with social, verbal, and intellectual stimulation; and
- caregivers working in space which is safe and designed for children are less likely to restrict the children's activities, and are more likely to provide a program which assists the child to develop skills, than are caregivers working in unsafe environments or settings which are poorly designed.

The adult work environment

Caregiver behaviour with the children is also related to caregiver job satisfaction. Caregivers who are dissatisfied tend to be restrictive, harsh and controlling. Research indicates that caregivers' job satisfaction is linked to adequate salaries, responsibility for a small number of children, time to prepare programs for the children, and opportunities for input into the centre's policies.

The impact of regulation

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Regulation cannot guarantee quality child care. However, research in both Canada and the United States involving both home child care and centre-based care has demonstrated that both the stringency of regulation and regulation per se increase the likelihood of quality. Studies comparing regulated and unregulated home child care providers show that:

- regulated home child care providers are significantly more likely to obtain a higher overall score on a standard measure of quality than are unregulated caregivers;
- regulated home child care providers are more likely to have received training related to the provision of child care than unregulated caregivers; and
- the children in regulated homes obtain higher scores on language tests than do age-mates in unregulated homes.

A research project in the United States involving 227 centres in five different states demonstrated a direct relationship between:

- the requirements of licensing regulations in regard to staff-to-child ratios and group size; and
- the extent to which caregivers in each state demonstrated the type of behaviour associated with quality programming (Phillips, et al., 1992).

These researchers also noted that the states having the most favourable staff-to-child ratios and group sizes tended to also have the highest requirements for training. As indicated above, research has shown a direct relationship between caregiver training and quality.

CHILD CARE REFORM IN ONTARIO

In its 1992 consultation document, *Setting the stage: Child care reform in Ontario*, the provincial government identified the following major concerns (most of which have been identified in this paper):

- the costs of providing child care have increased over the past few years and many parents cannot afford to pay the full fee for regulated care;
- funding for child care programs comes primarily from parental fees;
- too many child care programs are dependent for their survival on parent fee subsidies. Furthermore, the availability of fee subsidization is limited and the supply is unevenly distributed across the province; and
- some communities do not have an adequate supply of child care services in general. Others do not have an adequate supply of certain types of child care, for example, services for infants.

The Ontario government has committed itself to reforming the way child care is provided. If child care reform proposals are implemented, the funding and operation of child care could change substantially in Ontario.

- Child care would be funded through a combination of public funding and parent fees.
- Regulated non-profit centre-based and home child care programs would receive direct government funding to cover program operating costs. This would provide stability by ensuring a basic operating budget and lessen the need for providers of child care to be concerned about fluctuating child enrolment.
- Parent contributions to the cost of child care would be based on ability to pay and reasonable cost. Therefore, the family's financial situation would cease to be a barrier to access.
- The government would fund programs appropriately to cover the costs of providing part-time, seasonal, evening, and infant care as well as care for children with special needs. This would encourage and assist child care programs to be more flexible and responsive to family needs.
- New or additional child care services would be added to under-served areas to provide more equal access to child care across the province.
- Mechanisms would be established to strengthen local and parent participation in child care service planning and provision.

ENDNOTES

1. For additional information on the various roles of different levels of government see:
Friendly, M. (1994, in press). ***Child care policy in Canada: Putting the pieces together***. Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley Ltd.
2. Data on centre fees come from an unpublished survey conducted by the Ministry of Community and Social Services on a sample of regulated non-profit programs. The statistics exclude programs in Ottawa and Metropolitan Toronto. Fees are higher in these two municipalities than they are elsewhere.

Data on rural home child care fees come from the agency staff interviewed for this report.

Family income data come from a tabulation prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada's *Survey of Consumer Finances* microdata. This annual survey includes approximately 11,000 respondents from Ontario. Data from 1991 and 1992 were aggregated in order to increase the sample size. Average family income includes government transfers such as social assistance or unemployment insurance payments.
3. A non-profit child care agency which is authorized under the *Day Nurseries Act* to administer a fee subsidy program.
4. Data on estimated female workforce participation prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada's *Survey of Consumer Finances* microdata. Data from 1991 and 1992 were aggregated in order to increase the sample size.

CHAPTER III - EXPERIENCE WITH RURAL CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO: AN OVERVIEW

METHOD AND INFORMATION SOURCES

This section is based on:

- telephone interviews with nine people directly involved in providing child care services in rural communities in Ontario. The eight programs in question were selected to represent different types of rural communities in different parts of the province;
- telephone interviews with nine Ministry of Community and Social Services' field staff with experience relating to rural child care programs. The Ministry staff were responsible for some rural programs in addition to those represented by the service providers who were interviewed;
- annual reports from three rural programs in Ontario; and
- several reports from Ontario rural child care need assessment studies.

The people who were interviewed are identified in Appendix A. This appendix also lists the types of services provided by each child care organization.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Some general characteristics of rural communities influence their child care needs.

- **Seasonal variation is a predominant work pattern in many rural areas.** People working in agriculture, logging, and tourism work long hours and often seven days a week in certain months of the year but have shorter hours or no work at other times. As a result, they may only need seasonal child care;
- **Year-to-year variation in child care need occurs in many rural areas** depending on agricultural conditions and economics. Good weather can reduce the rush to get crops harvested and the need for farm women to participate in this activity one year. However, the following year, poor weather may require the women's participation and lead to a need for seasonal child care. Declining prices for crops or reduced sales increase the need for farm families to have one person working off the farm on a full-time basis. In these situations, the need for child care changes from a seasonal to a year-round full-time arrangement. The closure of a small nursing home in the area which employs women with young children may suddenly reduce the demand for child care;
- **The presence in rural communities of commuters who have to drive long distances to work** results in a need for child care before and after usual business hours. In the winter, travel time can be doubled due to road conditions; and
- **The presence of isolated stay-at-home parents without a car.** Both they and their children need services to combat the isolation they experience.

CHALLENGES IN ESTABLISHING RURAL CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

The following challenges in establishing a viable child care program appear to be common to all rural communities:

- **a scattered population** whose members have varying child care needs;
- **rural attitudes and values.** The idea of agency involvement in child care may be foreign to some rural residents and new child care organizations may have to address the initial distrust felt by potential users;
- **large geographic areas** may make it difficult to foster ownership of the child care service at the local community level;
- **lack of public transportation.** This is intensified by the often-reported reluctance of rural residents to drive more than 10 to 15 kilometres for child care;
- **higher program operating costs** resulting from higher costs for food and supplies and thus higher unit costs (number of children that can be served on a full-time basis for a given amount of money) than in urban areas; and
- **population shifts.** An area which has predominately been a farming community may become a bedroom commuter community, or in some communities, children "come in waves". The community may have a group of pre-school-age children at one point in time but these may become school-aged before the next wave of infants is born.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Among the Ontario rural programs interviewed, those which appear to be successfully providing a range of child care services to meet community needs are characterized by: flexibility, creativity, adequate resources, and a phased-in approach to the development of services. They also engage in on-going marketing of their services.

Flexibility

As noted earlier, change is an ever-present reality in rural areas. The characteristics of the community change and the needs of individual families change. In addition, a variety of child care needs are likely to be present even in a small rural population. Therefore, flexibility is a key ingredient in successfully meeting rural needs. Both service providers and Ministry program advisors must be flexible within a framework of what is known about quality programming and the requirements of the child care legislation.

Rural communities which appear to be meeting their child care needs successfully tend to have child care programs which:

- **have strong support from provincial government field staff** who assist the operator to overcome problems rather than rigidly interpreting the regulations according to their literal wording. For example, they may allow a centre to use a snow fence to delineate the play ground area instead of insisting it erect a solid fence;
- **have evolved and changed to meet changing needs and/or expectations** using a community development/education process. This requires service providers with both the skills

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and time to keep in touch with the community and track changes, to involve user-parents and the community in identifying needs and in decision-making, to work with natural leaders in the community, and to provide on-going leadership. An active community board of directors which includes parents can be very helpful in assisting a program to keep in touch with community needs; and

- **are mobile in order to address the barrier of distance or can move resources or change programs as community needs change.** Several organizations have mobile toy lending libraries which park in different communities on rotation; sometimes it also provides a parent-child drop-in and/or parent education program. The Lennox & Addington Resources for Children program has a van which brings providers and children from its regulated home child care program to a resource centre so that they can participate in play groups and training workshops. Southeast Grey Community Outreach operates a licensed centre in a very large trailer and one of the centres in The Lennox & Addington Resources for Children program operates in a portable building on the grounds of a school. Both these centres have facilities which can be literally moved to another community if demand shifts.

Creativity

Viable rural programs:

- **are creative in the use of their resources.** In North Wellington, a centre provides year-round care, seasonal care, and periodic/emergency care. It does this by supplementing staff in the summer and adding staff from the resource centre, if necessary, at other times. Temiskaming Child Care uses its van as a mobile resource centre in the winter and to provide transportation for children to and from a seasonal centre-based program in the summer. In some cases, the Southeast Grey Community Outreach Program achieves the twin goals of meeting community needs and providing full-time employment for people close to their place of residence by having the same person work some hours in a drop-in or parent relief program and some hours providing extended care in the evening in a centre program; and
- **are creative in obtaining resources through a variety of sources,** for example, Student Employment Experience Development (SEED) grants, in-kind contributions from municipalities and local business groups or service clubs, or parent fund raising from bake sales and raffles. All the providers interviewed stated that it is necessary that they supplement the funding available through the Ministry of Community and Social Services and parent fees.

Adequate resources

Programs which appear to be successful:

- **have a stable base of core funding** which can be used to subsidize child care services within the organization which are needed but cannot be financially viable on their own. Currently, the child care resource centre component, which is 100% funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, is subsidizing the regulated home child care program in at least three of the eight programs interviewed through funding all or part of the home visitor's salary and subsidizing a seasonal centre-based program in another organization. Almost all of them were base funded as flexible models at one time; and
- **have sufficient staff, not only per child but in absolute terms, to be able to move staff from one program to another as needs change and to cover the whole geographic area for which the agency is responsible.** The respondent from an organization which had recently been created out of the merger of two programs serving the same rural area

commented on how the merger had increased the ability to shift resources as required and serve more communities.

A phased-in approach to the development of services

Several successful providers started with a resource centre. This enabled the provision of a number of free or very low cost family-support services, such as toy lending libraries and parent-child drop-in programs. Such programs, in turn, assisted the agency to learn about the community and its needs and to become known and trusted.

Then, the successful programs developed a number of different services which addressed a variety of needs under the administration of one organization. For example: a) a resource centre with a toy lending library, a list of local caregivers, a drop-in centre, and support programs for informal caregivers; b) regulated home day care; and c) centre-based child care. The operation of several programs by one organization simplifies parents' access to service, provides parents with choices, and reduces duplication in administration and hence administrative cost. It also provides sufficient staff to allow people to work in more than one program, and to engage in community development and on-going service marketing.

Marketing

Finally, successful programs seem to market their services constantly. In rural communities, the potential pool of users for any one service is small. Currently, most of an operating budget for centre-based and home-based child care comes from parent fees. Unless a large number of potential users know about the service, the service may be under-used and become less financially viable. Successful programs use a number of strategies at the same time. Those mentioned include: a) delivering an information package to each new mother who gives birth in the local hospital; b) having booths at ploughing matches and Fall fairs; c) having floats in local parades; d) writing a weekly parent information column for the local newspaper; e) sending flyers home with school children; f) putting up posters in grocery stores and churches; and g) having brochures in the offices of local doctors and dentists.

THE SAME NEEDS, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Rural areas have a variety of child care needs including needs for: a) full-time care; b) part-time care; c) seasonal care; d) extended hours; and e) emergency or periodic care. (The same needs occur in urban communities). Each of these needs can be met in a variety of ways. Among the programs surveyed:

- **seasonal care** was provided in four different ways: a) care in the child's own home; b) centres which only operate during the summer; c) year-round centres which supplement their staffing in the summer so that they can care for additional children; and d) regulated home child care;
- **care for extended hours** was provided both in child care centres and regulated home child care; and
- **emergency or periodic care** was offered through: a) centre-based programs (if there are available unused spaces or an enrolled child is not attending for a few days because of an infectious disease); b) regulated home child care; c) resource centre drop-in programs; and d) care in the child's own home.

CHAPTER IV - EXPERIENCE WITH RURAL CENTRE-BASED CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO

INFORMATION SOURCES

Five of the service providers interviewed for this report operate centre-based programs.¹ Two of the agencies have two full-time centres, one has four full-time centres, and a fourth agency operates two summer centre-based programs. The fifth agency operates one seasonal program. The capacity of the eleven centres ranged from 16 to 31 with all but two of them having a capacity of 16. The centre with a capacity of 31 spaces actually uses only 16 spaces on a year-round basis. The remaining 15 spaces are used for emergency or periodic care (by supplementing the centre staff with resource centre staff) and to provide a summer seasonal program. Information about rural centres in general was also sought from the Ministry of Community and Social Services field staff who were interviewed for this report. (A list of all the people interviewed for this report is provided in Appendix A).

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Provincial government field staff in two different area offices noted that small rural communities have a population density that can, at best, only sustain centres with a licensed capacity of 12 to 20 children. The reality of rural centres seems to be that not all available spaces are occupied at a given point in time, even in a small 16-space centre. One provincial program advisor expressed the opinion that rural centre-based programs can operate effectively with as few as 12 children enrolled as long as they can operate a mixed-age group. It should be noted that the experience of the programs interviewed for this report suggests that stand-alone centres without base funding find it difficult to operate.

THE CHALLENGES FACING RURAL CHILD CARE CENTRES

At the present time, the major challenges facing rural child care centres are: a) the small potential number of users; b) variation in demand for child care; c) need for child care outside 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. (extended hours care); and, d) obtaining and retaining appropriately trained staff and paying adequate wages.

The small potential pool of users

The implications of a small potential pool of users are that:

- **centres must market their service continuously.** Currently, the majority of any centre's budget comes from parent fees. Therefore, it is important for survival to ensure that spaces are occupied. Marketing assists potential users to know that the service exists, however, it takes staff time away from direct service delivery;
- **centres have a small number of children suggesting that mixed-age groups should be considered.** A small centre means a small budget. As a result, centres cannot afford to hire the number of staff required to operate age-segregated groups (that is: infant, toddler, preschool, and school-age). Section 15 of the *Day Nurseries Act* permits two age groups to be combined if no more than 20% of the children are from the younger age group (for example, no more than 20% toddlers in a group of preschoolers) and the ratio of staff to children for the younger age group is used (in the above example, the ratio for toddlers). However, in some rural areas a logical group might include an infant as well as toddlers and preschoolers;

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- **centres have a small amount of physical space**, sometimes only one large room. This may make it difficult to provide separate space for different aged children);
- **centres tend to just break even**, lacking a financial cushion for unexpected major expenses such as re-drilling the well or replacing the roof, and;
- **centres must address the transportation issue**. It is reported that parents are reluctant to drive more than 10-15 kilometres for child care. Working parents are unable to transport children to after-school programs. Agency staff noted that school boards may take the position that they are only insured to transport children going to school. Therefore, they may not transport a child younger than mandatory school-age even if an older sibling is on the bus and the bus passes the child care centre. Other school boards do not allow a school-aged child to be dropped off at a place other than their home in order to attend an after-school program. One agency reported successfully changing school board policy in regard to school-aged children by involving parents in simultaneously lobbying school principals, the board of education administrative staff, and the board's trustees. Another agency has been able to set up car pools whereby a parent who is transporting a child to the program picks up other children from nearby homes.

Variations in demand for child care: Seasonal care

Three agencies surveyed for this report offer seasonal centre-based child care as a specific program and an additional agency provides this service if there are spaces available in its full-time centre. Where seasonal child care has been offered as a specific program, it has been staffed either by hiring students, usually through a Student Employment Experience Development (SEED) grant, (as in Northumberland and North Wellington), or by using full-time staff who work in the resource centre during the winter, as in Temiskaming.

One of the three seasonal programs is an expansion of a full-time program and operates in licensed child care space. However, buildings readily available for seasonal use, such as church basements, often do not meet the *Day Nurseries Act's* requirements in areas such as the brightness of the artificial light. In Ontario, child care programs with more than five unrelated children do not have to be licensed if they only operate for eight weeks or less.² Some seasonal programs cope with the fact the building does not meet the legislative requirements by operating for only this period of time. However, eight weeks does not cover the whole summer break so this may not meet parental needs. Furthermore, parents cannot be eligible for fee subsidy if they are using an unlicensed program.

None of the three seasonal programs operates beyond 6.00 p.m. Two programs reported that initially, farmers in their area wanted the service to extend into the evening. However, over time, farm families decided that they wanted their children home for the evening meal and that 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. gives sufficient time for both parents to work the farm. In the evening, one parent can work in or near the house and care for the children.

Changes in need over time

Reduced demand may result from the closure of the only local factory, or children "coming in waves". This is the phenomenon where a group of preschoolers reaches school-age without being replaced by a new "wave" of infants and preschoolers. This was identified as having caused the closure of two centres in two different communities. In situations where there is the possibility of reduced demand, existing community buildings may be used for child care. Another option is to use a potentially portable facility. The Lennox and Addington Resources for Children program uses a

portable building parked on school property; the Southeast Grey Community Outreach Program operates one of its centres in a very large trailer which was specially purchased for this purpose, gutted in the factory, and finished inside so that it complies with the *Day Nurseries Act*.

The need for extended hours care

The Southeast Grey Community Outreach Program addresses the need for extended care in two different ways. The staff in one of its three full-time centres work nine or ten hours a day four days a week. The other two centres have opted for using an additional person to provide extended hour coverage so that no staff person works for more than eight hours and all full-time staff work five days a week. None of the agencies from which information was collected provide overnight or week-end care. This is probably a reflection of the volume of demand for such care in their community and the fact that given the small volume, overnight and weekend care is more efficiently provided through a regulated home day care provider.

Obtaining and retaining appropriately trained staff

Child care need assessment reports conducted as recently as the late 1980's cited the unavailability of people with early childhood education in rural areas as a major challenge in the development of regulated care. However, the informants from both the Southeast Grey and the North Wellington agencies reported that in their communities, local young people are taking early childhood education in college and then returning home seeking work. As a result, trained staff are becoming available. Furthermore, they are often from a rural background, so they understand rural lifestyles. The challenges currently facing the centres in relation to staff relate to:

- **the type of training in early childhood education programs.** Currently, training tends to focus on preparing the student to work with separate age groups, not mixed-age groups which are usual in rural centres. Ontario experience also indicates that rural child care programs require people with skills in community development and education. The development of such skills is not usually part of early childhood education; and
- **the need to pay salaries which are commensurate with those in urban areas.**

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

What are appropriate physical space requirements in licensed centres in rural areas?

Available buildings in rural areas may not meet the current requirements for licensing, such as a separate flush toilet for staff and three sinks in the kitchen. Within the framework of what research has demonstrated to be crucial for safe and quality programming, consideration might be given to:

- whether summer seasonal programs, where children are likely to spend much of their time outdoors, need to meet the same indoor physical space requirements as year-round programs; and
- whether small programs, for example 15 or 16 spaces, need to meet the same requirements as larger programs.

What role should the use of mixed-age groups play?

Mixed-age groups, which are usual in small rural centres, are permitted by the *Day Nurseries Act* as long as they involve only two age groups, for example, toddlers and preschoolers. However, a family might have an infant, a toddler, and a preschooler, all of whom require child care. It would be more convenient for parents to be able to take all three children to the same program (especially if it is the only child care program). People interviewed for this paper identified the need to consider:

- the number of different age groups that can be permitted in a mixed-age group;
- operating guidelines for mixed-age groups, for example, the appropriate number of children for which one caregiver can be responsible, the need for a separate area where infants and toddlers can nap; and
- the type of training required by caregivers working with mixed-age groups.

How can qualified staff be retained?

Stability in child care is important for children. Research has identified that children who experience frequent changes in caregivers are more insecure while in child care. They also have poorer academic performance relative to their perceived ability at the end of grade one. Several studies have illustrated a direct relationship between salary levels and caregiver turnover rates (Doherty, 1991). To attract and retain qualified staff, rural centres must pay salaries similar to those in non-rural areas in addition to facing higher costs for things such as food and supplies.

ENDNOTES

1. A sixth, Muskoka Family Focus, also operates two centre-based programs but, both centres operate in towns with a population of 8,000 or more and have a capacity of 35 or more children. Therefore, the Muskoka Family Focus centres are not representative of centres in rural areas and are not included in this discussion.
2. The legislation permits child care for up to five children, excluding the caregiver's own children, to operate without a license. Group care for five or more unrelated children which operates for more than eight weeks must be licensed.

For additional information on mixed-age grouping see:

Balaban, N. (1991). Mainstreamed: Mixed-age groups of infants and toddlers at the Bank Street Family Center. *Zero to Three*, February, 13-16.

Katz, L.G., Evangelou, D., & Hartman, J.A. (1990). *The case for mixed age grouping in early childhood*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children. ED 326-302.

CHAPTER V - EXPERIENCE WITH RURAL REGULATED HOME CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO

A DESCRIPTION OF REGULATED HOME CHILD CARE

In this approach, individual caregivers provide child care in their own homes under the sponsorship of an agency licensed through the *Day Nurseries Act*. Under the *Day Nurseries Act*, the agency is responsible for:

- recruiting caregivers; and
- providing on-site supervisory visits through a home visitor and ensuring that caregivers adhere to the legislative requirements.

They may also:

- match the child with an appropriate caregiver;
- provide training; and
- obtain a back-up caregiver should the child's usual caregiver be unavailable.

The agency may lend the caregivers toys and equipment or help them form a caregiver mutual-support network within a given community. The cost to the parent (or the fee subsidy) covers: a) the rate paid to the caregiver; b) the salary paid to the agency staff who train and visit the caregivers; and c) the agency's liability insurance, supplies and equipment. In Ontario, most families using regulated home child care are subsidized.

The strengths of regulated home child care as a method of serving rural communities have been identified as: a) the compatibility with the perceived rural preference for child care in a home setting; b) the potential to provide flexible hours including overnight and weekend care; c) the low capital investment required to establish and operate the program; d) the ability of this approach to operate in an area which lacks the population base to sustain a centre; and e) the fact that caregivers are trained and receive on-going support and supervision (Draper, 1990).

INFORMATION SOURCES

Information on experience with regulated home child care was obtained from six agencies which are currently operating such programs in rural areas and nine Ministry of Community and Social Services field staff. The number of homes per agency ranged from seven to 21; three agencies operating 10 to 18 homes. According to agency respondents, only one program of the six is financially self-sufficient. It has 18 homes and has been operating for longer than four of the other five programs. Two agencies are currently receiving one-year only base funding from the Ministry's area office in an attempt to stabilize their programs. The other three agencies are subsidizing the regulated home child care program through their child care resource centre, usually by funding all or part of the home visitor's salary and mileage.

THE CHALLENGES FACING RURAL REGULATED HOME CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

The major challenges facing regulated home child care in rural communities are: achieving financial viability, obtaining and retaining caregivers, obtaining sufficient users, and responding to seasonal demand.

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Financial viability

Agencies operating regulated home child care programs are funded primarily through fee subsidies and parent fees with some additional funding from the provincial government's Wage Subsidy Grant (the amount of which depends, in part, on the number of providers being supervised by the agency). Three provincial government field staff from three different areas noted how difficult it is for rural agencies to be financially viable as stand-alone programs within the current funding approach. The reasons for this are as follows:

- a low population density often means that rural home child care agencies cannot place as many children in a provider's home as the *Day Nurseries Act* would permit;
- home visitors have greater distances to cover so they can supervise fewer homes at a given level of supervision than their urban counterparts. Providers also identified a need to have more frequent visits by the home visitor than might be needed in urban areas in order to combat the isolation experienced by rural home child care providers. In one rural agency, the home visitor supervises 15 homes, with permission from the local Ministry area office, in contrast to the responsibility for 25 homes found in urban areas and the maximum specified in the *Day Nurseries Act*. As a result, the proportion of the budget spent on home visitors may be higher in rural than in urban programs; and
- mileage and telephone costs tend to be higher in rural than in urban areas.

Several of the rural home child care programs currently operating in Ontario are able to do so only because they can subsidize this program from their resource centre budget.

Obtaining and retaining caregivers

Agency staff reported difficulties both in obtaining caregivers in general and in obtaining caregivers who live near parents who want to use the service. Rural informal caregivers were identified as tending to mistrust the idea of an agency being involved in their business. Agency staff described having to spend a significant amount of time with each potential caregiver explaining the advantages of having the agency deal with parents around fees, pay on a guaranteed basis for care given, and provide various supports. The Lennox and Addington Resources for Children program targeted natural leaders in each community, (for example, the owner of the village store) and sought their help in identifying credible local people to be approached to become caregivers.

People interviewed for this report felt that provider isolation is greater in rural than in urban areas. In order to retain caregivers, agencies must provide supports such as a mobile toy and equipment library which goes to caregivers' homes on a regular basis or transportation for caregivers to come with the children to drop-in programs or play groups or caregiver training. One agency which is having problems obtaining and retaining caregivers attributed its difficulties to not having sufficient staff to spend the necessary time recruiting and supporting its child care providers.

Obtaining sufficient users

It has been suggested that rural parents are used to informal care and that this is compatible with rural reliance on family and neighbourhood networks (Draper, 1990). Family incomes in rural areas tend to be somewhat lower than in urban areas (see Appendix D) and food, gasoline, and clothing tend to be more expensive. A rural parent who finds a neighbour willing to provide child care, it may be difficult for the parent to see advantages in what appears to be more expensive agency-sponsored care. Agencies have found that they have to market their service constantly because of

the relatively low user population base. Successful marketing was reported as including assuring parents that the agency can provide flexible hours and that, in addition, it will supervise the caregiver and provide a backup caregiver when needed. It has also been found helpful to point out to potential users that parents using regulated care may be eligible for a fee subsidy and will receive income tax receipts.

Responding to seasonal demand

Regulated home child care agencies have on-going overhead costs associated with the home visitor and administration. Therefore, they need an adequate base of year-round users in order to survive. Home child care providers generally want full-time work and often are reluctant to take children for only a few weeks. Agency staff reported being able to accommodate seasonal use if they have sufficient year-round users and the seasonal demand involved only a few children. However, if the demand for child care in a community is primarily seasonal it may be better met by a seasonal centre-based program which relies on students as some of its staff.

Group family day care

Group family day care (two providers in one home looking after six to ten children), has been tried several times in Ontario as one way of addressing the social isolation experienced by rural home child care providers. Two of the agencies surveyed for this report had tried this model. In both cases, it had been discontinued. Reported problems were:

- too much wear and tear on the home and too much disruption to the family life of the provider in whose home the program operated;
- caregiver burnout. Two providers looking after ten children in an isolated situation are not able to get a break during the day. In one situation, burn-out had been addressed by hiring additional part-time staff. This meant an increased number of different adults looking after the children, which reduced caregiver consistency. The arrangement also made the program more costly to operate; and
- the current regulatory requirements. A child care home with ten or more children must meet some of the Ministry of Health's requirements for restaurants and have an area set aside specifically for the use of the children. This imposes a significant added cost to opening the program and turns what was a home environment into one that begins to look like a small centre.

During the mid-1980's, the Ministry of Community and Social Services funded five pilot family child care programs where there were two providers looking after up to 10 children. All five pilots ran into problems retaining caregivers and eventually closed their programs.¹ Two provinces, Québec and Manitoba, regulate group family day care.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

What should the role of the sponsoring agency be?

Research conducted in both Canada and the United States has shown that the quality of home-based child care is higher when:

- the caregiver is sponsored and supervised by an agency; and

- training opportunities specific to the provision of child care in a home setting are provided (Doherty, 1991).

There is a need to identify what specific aspects of agency sponsorship encourage quality and how these aspects might be provided in rural settings.

What are appropriate requirements for a regulated provider's home in a rural community?

People interviewed for this report suggested that some current requirements for the provider's home assume an urban setting. For example, the need for fencing may be different in a rural area than it is in an urban area with busy streets. There appears to be a need to re-think what is required to provide a safe environment for the child while at the same time recognizing the realities of rural homes.

ENDNOTES

1. Adele Scott-Anthony, Child Care Branch, personal communication.

CHAPTER VI - EXPERIENCE IN ONTARIO WITH THE PROVISION OF CARE IN THE CHILD'S OWN HOME

INFORMATION SOURCES

Information on experience providing care for children in their own homes was obtained from five programs which provided seasonal on-farm care in 1993 and/or in previous years and two programs with experience providing emergency care in the child's own home. Three of the five seasonal on-farm programs were discontinued prior to 1993, one has operated since 1988 and the other operated in 1992 and 1993. Impressions about what has been learned about providing child care in the child's own home were also sought from Ministry field staff. In order to incorporate information from programs which no longer operate, the information on seasonal on-farm child care programs is presented in the past tense. (A list of people interviewed for this report is provided in Appendix A).

A DESCRIPTION OF THE APPROACH USED IN ONTARIO TO PROVIDE SEASONAL ON-FARM CARE

Seasonal on-farm child care programs in Ontario used college and university students working for a minimum wage. To the extent possible, the programs hired students who were studying early childhood education or a related field. Typically, the students started employment in May with a two-to five-day orientation course which included specific training in health and safety in a farm environment. On-going supervision was provided through a combination of scheduled periodic on-site visits, unscheduled on-site visits, and telephone contact between an agency staff member and the student. The frequency of on-site visits varied across programs from bi-weekly to monthly, depending, in part, upon distances to be travelled. The students were sent out to the farm home with a resource kit including toys and games appropriate for the ages of the children in question, and, in some programs, safety equipment such as a fire extinguisher and first aid kit. All programs required families to pre-book the service through a central coordinator who then matched the family with a student caregiver. Use by any one family was limited by all programs to two or three days a week, nine to twelve hours a day, and 25 days or less a season.

The two programs which operated in 1993 were funded through a combination of Student Employment Experience Development (SEED) grants and private donations. Because the care was unlicensed, the Ministry of Community and Social Services did not provide operating grants and parents were not eligible for fee subsidization. In one program, the fee for parents was \$4.50 an hour for all children in the family or up to four non-sibling children (for example, if parents from adjacent farms had all the children in one location). At the same time, this program paid the student caregivers \$7.50 per hour plus OHIP, vacation pay and mileage. Costs to the agency were also incurred for time spent providing a five-day orientation course for the students, booking the service, and providing on-going supervision for the caregivers. All five programs for which information was obtained had a policy of allowing last minute cancellations due to rain without cost to the parent. However, one program charged the family \$15.00 if the cancellation was not made before 8.00 a.m. and another limited the number of no-charge cancellations due to weather that a family could have per season.

THE CHALLENGES FACING PROVIDERS OF SEASONAL ON-FARM CARE

Seasonal on-farm child care providers reported their major challenges to be: financial viability, child and caregiver safety, high caregiver turnover rates, and decreasing demand for this type of care.

Financial viability

Programs which are not licensed (and none of the seasonal on-farm programs were) are not eligible for operating grants in Ontario and users are not eligible for fee subsidy. None of the programs for which information was obtained charged parents the amount of money required to cover the costs of operating the service. The rationale was that this would have made the service too expensive. Furthermore, programs allowed parents to cancel a booked service because the weather was poor without cost to the parent. Some programs paid the caregiver for days not worked due to cancellations. Others, in an effort to keep costs down, did not.

All the programs carried liability insurance. The cost of this could be expensive. One provider noted that the liability insurance specifically prohibited combining children from two farms at one home. As a result, situations could arise where the caregiver was looking after only two or three children of an age where one caregiver could have safely supervised additional children. This meant that the unit costs were higher than they would have been otherwise.

Because of funding limitations, none of the programs could provide service to a given family more than two or three days a week. This does not meet the needs of farmers. During their peak harvesting season they require child care six or seven days a week and all farms in the area need this level of service at the same time. One provider noted that when a centre offering seasonal care became available, farmers in her area opted for it because it could provide five days of service a week rather than two or three. This reduced the use of the on-farm program and therefore its revenue.

Child and caregiver safety

Farms are unsafe environments. An agency sponsoring the on-farm child care program cannot regulate the situation in the user's home the way an agency providing regulated home child care can regulate its providers' homes. Interview respondents mentioned being told of loaded guns and various chemicals lying around in user's homes or machinery left running unattended. Such situations raise concern about the appropriateness of placing students with little training in uncontrolled situations where they are responsible for the safety of young children..

Caregiver turnover rates

Stability in child care arrangements is important for children. It enables the caregiver to develop an understanding the child's needs, and ways of conveying needs, and the child to develop a sense of trust. Research has shown that children who experience frequent changes in caregivers are more insecure than those who do not (Doherty, 1991). Three of the five agencies with experience in providing seasonal on-farm care noted that caregiver turnover was a problem. This has also been the experience in Prince Edward Island and Québec (see Chapter VIII). The primary reasons for caregiver turnover appear to be:

- the practice, in some agencies, of not paying the caregiver for days which were booked but not worked as a result of parents cancelling due to poor weather. Agency staff reported that students were often trying to earn money for next year's college or university tuition and would

quit part way through the season in order to take a job elsewhere with a guaranteed salary level; and

- caregiver isolation. The nature of the job is that the student is alone with the children for long hours in an isolated situation. Some students had never worked alone before. Agency staff noted it was difficult to combat the isolation with the frequency of on-site visits they were able to make given the availability of agency staff.

Decreasing demand for seasonal on-farm child care

An increasing number of farm families have one parent working off the farm on a full-time basis while the other parent is occupied all day doing farm work. In these situations, the need is for year-round full-time child care, not seasonal child care.

THE PROVISION OF EMERGENCY CARE IN THE CHILD'S OWN HOME

The two programs with experience in this type of service provision in the child's own home served non-farm as well as farm families. The agency which had a formal program to provide emergency care in a child's own home, for example, when the child's regular caregiver was ill, used a group of caregivers on a roster system with a retainer fee of \$25.00 a day. The caregivers had training supplied by the agency and went into the home with a kit consisting of program and safety items. The service was unable to be financially self-supporting and the agency now handles emergency care by placing the child in one of its centres or regulated family child care homes.

A second agency occasionally hires someone to care for a child in the child's own home in an emergency but tries to use its centre program or parent-child drop-in first. This agency also tried having people on call to provide emergency care in the child's home. It found there was insufficient demand to justify a retainer fee and that most people looking for part-time work want a predictable schedule.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Should child care in the child's own home be regulated?

The province has clearly stated that it will not fund unregulated child care (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1992). Therefore, if the provision of care in the child's own home is to receive provincial funding, it will have to be regulated. This would require consideration of issues such as:

- inspection and regulation of the user's home, for example, should the requirements be the same as those for regulated home child care providers sponsored by an agency, should user's homes have to pass an inspection by the local fire department; and
- the required frequency of on-site supervisory visits by qualified staff members of the sponsoring agency.

How can caregiver turnover rates be kept low?

Both seasonal centre-based and seasonal on-farm programs reported using students. However, turnover rates appeared to be much more of a problem for the on-farm programs. Being part of a centre's program provides the student with regular contact with other adults during the day, the

opportunity to share tasks, and the possibility of relief in difficult situations, for example, a power struggle with a child. The student working alone on a farm has none of these supports. Given the age of the students used, and the possibility that some have never worked alone or been responsible for young children, contact with adults experienced in looking after children may be very important. The other difference is that a student working in a centre contracts to work, and is paid for, a specific number of days. The student providing on-farm child care may not be paid for days not worked. If on-farm child care is to be provided by students, some way must be found to address the twin issues of isolation and salary.

CHAPTER VII - RESOURCE CENTRES, SCHOOL-AGE CARE, AND CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

RESOURCE CENTRES

Resource centres in Ontario are funded 100% by the Ministry of Community and Social Services but are currently not regulated under the *Day Nurseries Act* or any other piece of legislation. They provide a range of support services to parents in their child caring role and to child care providers. Services can include: a) drop-in and/or play group programs where the parent or child care provider remains with the child; b) temporary care for a few hours while the parent is elsewhere; c) toy/equipment lending libraries; d) a list of local child care providers; or e) a variety of educational opportunities.

Seven of the eight rural programs whose staff were interviewed for this report operate a resource centre. These provide supports to stay-at-home parents and to unregulated caregivers.

Supports to stay-at-home parents

Supports to parents include:

- regular drop-in programs which provide an opportunity for parents to meet other parents, to look through a resource library of materials related to child rearing, or to seek advice from early childhood education specialists. Some programs are mobile and set up in different communities on a rotating basis;
- temporary care. The Great Parent Break, which has been operated by the Southeast Grey Community Outreach Program since 1989, is staffed by qualified early childhood educators. The parent can leave the child for four or more hours any Wednesday or Friday between 8.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. This enables parents to attend medical or other appointments or to simply have a break. The Durham West Farm Child Care Program hires informal caregivers to come to the resource centre to provide temporary care on an as-requested basis; and
- resource lending libraries, for example, toys, large equipment.

Supports for informal caregivers

Informal (unregulated) care is the most frequently used form of child care in both rural and urban settings.¹ The Durham West Child Care Program sponsors an informal caregivers' association which meets bi-monthly and has a regular newsletter. Association members are eligible for special educational seminars, equipment lending, and telephone support from the agency's staff. They can also participate in play groups for informal caregivers and the children they are looking after. Other resource centres specifically point out in their brochures and advertising that informal caregivers are eligible for their services. Blue (1990) notes that rural informal caregivers may not seek out assistance. Therefore, promotion and outreach to this group must be an integral part of the program. In addition, the services must be accessible both in terms of location and cost.

Issues to consider

How can resource centres be part of a child care system?

Currently, resource centres are not regulated. However, if child care is viewed as a support to parents in their child rearing role, all resource centres are part of the child care continuum. Furthermore, some resource centres are providing periodic child care while the parent is elsewhere.

What is the role of resource centres in supporting informal caregivers?

The research is clear that regulated child care is more likely to provide a quality program than is unregulated care (Doherty, 1991). However, informal child care is used by a majority of working families to provide alternative child care. Studies have shown that the quality of home-based child care is higher when caregivers have supports in the community, for example, mutual-support groups, and opportunities for training (Doherty, 1991). As noted above, some resource centres provide support for informal caregivers. However, there are currently no guidelines for resource centres regarding their role in relation to informal caregivers.

SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE

Rural children whose parents work often need both before- and after-school child care because parents may leave home early and may not arrive back until 6.30 or 7.00 p.m. Transportation is a major problem in such situations. If the child care is provided through a centre or someone else's home, the child may face a daily transition involving parent's car to child care, school bus to school, school bus to child care, parent's car to home. A preferable option may be school-age child care provided at the school. This cuts down travel and enables the child to socialize with peers to a greater extent than is likely possible if the child must depend on parent transportation to friends' houses outside school hours.

The 1988 Ministry of Community and Social Services and Ministry of Education joint policy document ***Child care for school-age children*** provided for permanent child care spaces as part of every new school building. The capital cost is paid 100% by the Ministry of Education up to a maximum of \$350,000. The Ministry of Community and Social Services assists the operator with the initial purchase of furniture and equipment. This initiative has resulted in the development of nearly 200 new child care services across Ontario.²

Several agencies reported that their communities are actively working with school boards and have or hope to set up school-age child care. One barrier to the development of viable school-age on-site child care occurs when the school board will not allow use of school buildings on teacher professional development days or the two school breaks.

Issues to consider

How can local communities encourage and assist cooperative ventures between school boards and other agencies for the provision of on-site school-age child care?

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Providing supports to appropriate child care for children with special needs may be even more difficult in rural areas than it is in urban areas. However, child care is important for providing these children with developmental opportunities. Rural centres may find integration difficult because they

do not have additional staff for children with special needs, and may not be able to obtain consultation services due to lack of local availability. In her review of 54 local child care planning and/or needs assessment reports conducted in Ontario between 1987 and 1991, Draper (1991) noted that the reports repeatedly stated that integration of children with special needs in child care settings requires:

- consultation by a resource teacher and/or specialists such as a speech pathologist;
- better staff-to-child ratios;
- and/or additional program staff.

Some child care programs for children with special needs may require additional supports and/or staff to meet individual needs within the group.

Issues to consider

How might consultation services for children with special needs be best provided to rural child care programs?

Rural child care programs generally do not have the budget to purchase consultation services, even if such services are available locally. However, precedents exist in rural areas for joint sharing of resources among school boards, between school boards and other children's services, or between different types of children's services, for example a children's mental health centre and a child care program. In Durham Region, an independent Resource Teacher Program provides consultation to all child care programs in the Region.

What types of training and support do child care providers require to provide appropriate care for children with special needs?

Research has found that the extent to which developmentally handicapped children benefit from integration into non-specialized child care depends on appropriate staff training (Doherty, 1991). The following four-stage process has been recommended:

- orientation to children with special needs in general;
- specific training related to the type of child to be served;
- specific training related to the special needs of the individual child or children to be cared for; and
- on-going skill maintenance training (Fraser North Child Care Issues Society Exceptional Health Care Project, 1991).

How should staff training relevant to children with special needs be provided?

Options include joint training for all regulated and non-regulated caregivers in an area or group training by home visitors only for caregivers sponsored by the agency.

ENDNOTES

1. A special tabulation done by Dr. Donna Lero of the University of Guelph using data from the 1988 *Canadian National Child Care Study* found that in the sample of Ontario communities with a population of less than 15,000 and rural communities, 38.1% of children under age six were receiving unregulated care from a non-relative. Only 15.3% were receiving regulated child care.
2. Don Gilroy, Ministry of Education and Training, personal communication.

CHAPTER VIII - RURAL CHILD CARE IN OTHER CANADIAN JURISDICTIONS

INTRODUCTION

A survey of the other provinces indicated that there have been few Canadian programs outside Ontario which have specifically targeted the needs of rural families.

ALBERTA

The *Alberta Rural Care Child Project* was funded in 1991 for a one-year period using \$75,000.00 from the Alberta Lottery Fund. This money was used for 19 projects sponsored by local rural groups. The projects included:

- developing lists of local caregivers;
- several families sharing the services of one informal child care provider for emergency care;
- two neighbours hiring a college student for the summer to look after the children from both families; and
- several projects which funded grandmothers or other relatives to provide child care.

Developing caregiver lists and sharing a caregiver were both deemed successful (The Alberta Women's Institute, 1992).

MANITOBA

The Child Minder Program

This Program consists of a caregiver with a first aid certificate who is recruited, oriented and approved (not licensed) by the provincial government to provide care in a child's own home. This program has been cited as providing rural child care (Fédération des agricultrices du Québec, 1993; Lundrigan, 1990; Lunn, 1992). However, according to a Manitoba government official, the target group is parents who require care at unusual hours, have more than one child under age 12 living at home, and are eligible for parental fee subsidy. Furthermore, it has rarely been used in rural situations.

Rural child care centres

Manitoba has several small rural centres, such as Lakeview Children's Centre in the village of Langruth (north of Winnipeg). It has 18 spaces for pre-school-age children and also operates a 10-space school-age program. It provides extended hours and serves both the village and the surrounding farming community.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The seasonal on-farm child care program

Prince Edward Island operated a program providing care in the child's own home for farm parents in 1991. It was not repeated in 1992 or 1993 due to lack of government funds. Funding for the students who were used as caregivers was obtained through the Department of Industry using a student summer employment program. An orientation and basic training was provided by the Department of Health and Social Services whose staff also met periodically with the caregivers in various local offices but did not provide any on-site supervision. Agriculture Employment Services acted as coordinator and booking office using an agri-crew approach.¹ When cancellations occurred due to weather, the students were assigned to a child care centre to help out and gain experience. Concerns about the way the program operated in 1991 include:

- the amount of caregiver turnover experienced due to students leaving part way through the summer;
- rotation (lack of consistency) of caregivers sent to work on a farm, creating inconsistency for the children;
- the possible liability of the government since it was funding and operating the program; and
- the fact that the program was not financially viable on parent fees alone and had to be subsidized by additional government funding.

Seasonal centre-based child care

Prince Edward Island also has several centres which operate on a seasonal basis, usually early May to September. They are licensed, provided with a provincial operating grant, and parents are eligible for fee subsidy. These programs use available buildings in the community and toys and equipment provided through the toy and equipment lending library operated by the Early Childhood Education Association of Prince Edward Island.

The mobile toy lending library/drop-in program

A mobile toy lending library/drop-in program which covered eight different communities on a rotation basis was funded through federal grants until a couple of years ago. Currently some, but not all, of the eight communities continue to operate the service using toys and equipment left over from the federally-funded program and local buildings. Staffing is provided by the user-parents.

QUÉBEC

The provision of care in the child's own home

Québec has had two pilot projects involving the provision of care in the child's own home. The first, in Wotton, provided child care in the child's own home for one day a week for farm families. The program was intended for parents who were doing farm work during the period of child care. The child's home had to be approved by the provincial child care licensing body (l'Office des services de garde à l'enfance) as meeting certain safety and health standards and l'Office also approved the caregiver. This project ended in 1986. Concerns included the fact it was not cost-effective and there was high caregiver turnover. There were also questions about the potential liability of the provincial government as funder and administrator.

The second pilot project operated from June, 1990 to March, 1991 and involved 25 families from a mixture of rural and urban communities. They were matched with 20 families who received regulated home child care. The study's report noted that there were advantages to providing care in the child's home, such as the fact the parent did not have to transport the child and the child remained in a familiar environment. However, it concluded that regulated home child care provided more advantages for both parent and child. Advantages for regulated care included the provision of programming which was more developmentally appropriate for the child and the provision of playmates for isolated children or situations where there was only a single child.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Alberta - Marlene Jubenville, Alberta Social Services
- Manitoba - Julie Friesen, Manitoba Department of Social Services
- Prince Edward Island - Kathy Rochon, Department of Health and Social Services
- Québec - Margaret de Serre, L'office des services de garde à l'enfance
 - Pharand, S. (1991). *Un service de garde revisité: La garde au domicile du parent*. Paper presented at the National Conference on Farm Women and Employment, Beaufort, Quebec. November 20-22, 1992.

ENDNOTES

1. In agriculture, the agri-crew approach involves a pool of farm labourers with individual being sent to work on farms on a day-by-day basis as needed. For the program in question, the students formed the work pool and were sent to individual farms on request.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Approved corporation

A non-profit child care agency which is authorized under the *Day Nurseries Act* to administer the parent fee subsidy program. This generally (but not exclusively) occurs in a situation where the local municipality chooses not to administer the fee subsidy program or the area is an unorganized territory.

Home child care

Individual caregivers providing child care in their own homes. In regulated home child care, the providers work under the sponsorship of an agency licensed through the *Day Nurseries Act*. The agency is responsible for providing on-going supervision according to the *Day Nurseries Act*. They may provide training and other supports.

Home visitor

An employee of an agency operating a home child care program. This person is responsible for making regular supervisory visits to the home of each caregiver sponsored by the agency.

Informal care/informal caregiver

Child care provided by a home child caregiver (in her home or in the child's home) who is not regulated under the *Day Nurseries Act*. Sometimes referred to as unregulated care. The *Day Nurseries Act* permits up to six preschool children (excluding the provider's children) to be cared for in an unregulated home.

Regulated child care

Child care which is regulated under the *Day Nurseries Act* (sometimes referred to as licensed child care).

Regulated home child care

See entry for home child care.

Resource centre

A program funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services to provide a range of support services to parents in the child rearing role and to child care providers. Services may include drop-in or play groups where the parent or caregiver remains, toy and equipment lending libraries, a list of local child care providers, and various educational opportunities.

Seasonal care

The provision of child care on a seasonal basis only, usually (but not always) during the summer, to cover the peak busy periods of farm families and tourist operators.

Staff-child ratio

The number of children for whom one staff member is responsible. The ratios specified in the *Day Nurseries Act* regulations differ according to the age of the child.

Unregulated child care

Child care which is not regulated under the *Day Nurseries Act* (sometimes referred to as informal care).

KEY INFORMANTS

RURAL CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Organization name, individuals interviewed	Services provided by organization
Durham West Farm Child Care Program Lynn Anne Outram (905) 985-3831	Seasonal on-farm care, periodic parent relief program, resource centre, child care information exchange, informal caregiver support group
Lambton Rural Child Care Lori Redmond (519) 882-3480	Seasonal on-farm care, regulated home child care, resource centre
Lennox & Addington Resource for Children Ewa Massey-Henry (613) 354-6318	Centres, regulated home child care, resource centre, school-age child care, resource teacher program. Used to operate group family day care
Muskoka Family Focus Laura Stoutin (705) 645-3027	Centres, regulated home child care, resource centre, school-age child care
North Wellington Advisory Group Barbara Brownell (519) 848-2667	Centres, regulated home child care, emergency care in child's home, resource centre. Used to operate group family day care
Northumberland Rural Child Care Margaret Appleby (board member) Janet Mathews (executive director) (613) 475-1325	Summer centre-based program, regulated home child care, school-age care. Used to operate a seasonal on-farm program
Southeast Grey Community Outreach (Kid n' Us) Carol Gott (519) 896-3692	Centres, regulated home child care, resource centre, periodic parent relief program, school-age child care. Used to provide emergency care in child's home
Centre pour enfants Temiskaming child care Judy Parker (705) 267-7901	Centre, regulated home child care, seasonal centre-based program, resource centre. Used to operate seasonal on-farm program

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Margaret de Serre

Manitoba
Department of Family Services
Julie Friesen

Alberta
Department of Social Services
Marlene Jubenville

British Columbia
Ministry of Women's Equality
Jane Beach

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION, RURAL ONTARIO

NUMBER OF CHILDREN AGE 0-14 YEARS

Table I illustrates the number of children living in communities of different sizes and types. The age range 0 - 14 is presented since this combines standard age ranges used by Statistics Canada. There is no intention to imply that children up to age 14 should receive child care.

Table I

The number of children age 0-14 years living in different sized communities in Ontario, 1991

Total population	Age 0-4 (707,595)	Age 5-9 (689,395)	Age 10-14 (658,260)	Total, age 0-14 (2,055,250)
Total urban population	570,085	544,170	517,035	1,631,290
• 10,000 +	532,710	505,895	481,560	1,520,165
• 5,000 - 10,000	16,230	16,110	14,855	47,195
• urban less than 5,000	21,145	22,165	20,620	63,930
Total rural population	137,510	145,225	141,225	423,960
• rural metro fringe	40,450	40,520	38,870	119,840
• rural city fringe	17,110	18,615	18,700	54,425
• isolated rural	79,950	86,090	83,655	249,695

Source: Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada 1991 Census data.

Notes: Statistics Canada defines rural as those areas lying outside urban areas. An urban area is defined as an area which has attained a population concentration of at least 1,000 and a population density of at least 400 people per square kilometre.

Rural metro fringe includes rural areas that are socially and economically integrated into an urban centre with a population of 100,000 or more.

Rural city fringe includes rural areas that are socially and economically integrated into an urban centre with a population of 10,000 to 99,999.

Isolated rural areas are those not integrated into an urban centre with a population of 10,000 or more.

NUMBER OF RURAL CHILDREN LIVING ON FARMS

Table II provides information on the children living in rural Ontario who were living on farms in 1991. Rural was defined as for Table I, on the previous page, and includes the three categories of rural metro fringe, rural city fringe, and isolated rural. The farm rural population was defined as persons living in rural areas who are members of households of farm operators living on their farms. Rural non-farm refers to people in rural areas not living in such households.

Table II

The number of farm and non-farm children in Ontario in 1991

Total rural population	Age 0-4 (137,510)	Age 5-9 (145,225)	Age 10-14 (141,225)	Total (423,960)
Total rural farm population	14,660	17,540	18,165	50,365
Total rural non-farm population	122,850	127,685	123,060	373,595

Source: Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada 1991 Census data.

PARTICIPATION IN THE PAID WORKFORCE

Men and Women

Table III, on the following page, was developed from data from the *Canadian National Child Care Study* (Lero et al., 1992). This used a total Ontario sample of 20,687 households with at least one child under age 13. The sample was selected to be representative of both urban and rural areas. A rural community was defined as one with less than 1,000 people and a population density of less than 400 per square kilometre at the time of the 1986 census. Family information was collected using a standard questionnaire conducted by telephone in the Fall of 1988. The table illustrates that 54.6% of all couples living in urban communities of less than 1,500, or rural communities, with at least one child under age six were dual-earner families. An additional 35.2% of couples living in similar communities were single-earner families.

Table III

Distribution of families in Ontario with at least one child under age 13, by parents' employment status and community population density, 1988.

Age of youngest child	Population of 100,000 or more	Population between 15,000 and 99,999	Urban population less than 1,500 and rural
With youngest child less than age six			
two-earner couples	50.9%	49.9%	54.6%
one-earner couple	34.8%	33.8%	35.2%
one-earner single parent	6.4%	-----	-----
other	7.9%	10.5% *	5.9% *
With youngest child between age six and 12			
two-earner couples	60.4%	58.9%	63.9%
one-earner couple	21.0%	21.4% *	22.6%
one-earner single parent	13.0%	14.2%	8.0%
other	5.5%	-----	-----

Source: The *Canadian National Child Care Study*, 1988. Special tabulations by Dr. Donna S. Lero, University of Guelph, 1993.

Notes: The symbol ----- means that the percentage is too small to report, * signals a need to treat the percentage with caution due to sample variability.

Female participation in the paid workforce

Table IV, provides information on the **estimated** participation in the paid labour force by women living in rural communities. It was developed using data from the annual Statistics Canada Survey of Consumer Finances. This survey contains approximately 11,000 respondents from Ontario. Of these, approximately 20% have at least one child under age seven. In the table the data for two years, 1991 and 1992, have been combined into a single, aggregated data set in order to increase the sample size and thus provide a more accurate estimate based on it. The estimate of workforce participation in Table III is based on an average of the two years. Rural is defined as a community of less than 1,000 people and with a population density of less than 400 per square kilometre. The table indicates that approximately 44,200 women in rural areas and urban areas of less than 2,500 people work full-time or mostly-full time outside the home.

Table IV

Estimated labour force participation of women with children under age seven during reference year (combined 1991 and 1992).

Location of residence	Mostly full-time	Mostly part-time	Not in labour force	Total
Rural and urban less than 2,500	44,200 (43%)	29,365 (29%)	28,240 (28%)	101,805 (100%)
Urban area, more than 2,500	273,220 (49%)	137,420 (24%)	152,780 (27%)	563,420 (100%)

Source: Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada's *Survey of Consumer Finances* microdata, 1991 and 1992.

Participation in paid off-farm work by farm families

Statistics Canada (1991) reports that 24% of all Ontario farms with two operators had one of the two persons engaged in paid off-farm work for 190 or more days during 1990. An additional two-operator farms had one person in paid off-farm work for 60 - 189 days. In 14% of these situations (12,940 farms) the person working off-farm for 60 or more days was female. Unfortunately, the data do not indicate the ages of the women's children.

THE AVAILABILITY OF CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO

In Ontario in 1991, there were:

- 848,625 children under age six and 946,195 children age six to 12 (Statistics Canada, 1992); and
- an estimated 350,670 women in the paid workforce with at least one child under age six living at home (Statistics Canada, 1993).

In 1993, there were 129,752 children enrolled in licensed child care centres and an estimated 15,793 children in regulated home child care situations (Ministry of Community and Social Services, personal communication). This gives a total of approximately 145,545 children receiving regulated child care. The number of children receiving informal (unregulated) child care is impossible to estimate. It should be noted that the above information includes children in child care between age 0 and 12 while the female employment estimate is for women with at least one child under age six. Nevertheless, the figures show a significant discrepancy between likely need for child care and the availability of regulated child care.

In 1990, the federal budget limited the growth of federal cost-sharing for child care under the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) to Ontario to a five percent increase per year over the previous year's amount. The period of limitation has since been extended to the end of the 1994/95 fiscal year. The imposition of this limit occurred at a time when the need for social services has increased dramatically as a result of the recession. To maintain existing parent fee subsidy levels, the province has had to contribute significantly more provincial money. This has resulted in pressure to limit the expansion of child care. Nevertheless, the government added 20,000 fully subsidized spaces to the system in 1993 to support the Jobs Ontario Program.

Maintenance of existing services and an increase in the potential for increased availability has resulted from:

- the Ministry of Community and Social Services' acknowledgement of the need to provide stable operating funding to increase financial viability for child care programs. It has also publicly committed itself to do this for regulated non-profit programs; and
- the joint Ministry of Education and Ministry of Community and Social Services' 1988 initiative to provide permanent child care spaces as part of every new elementary school building with the capital cost of the building paid 100% by the Ministry of Education and Training up to a maximum of \$350,000. The Ministry of Community and Social Services assists the operator in the initial purchase of furniture and equipment. This has resulted in the development of nearly 200 new child care services across the Province with nearly 100 additional centres in the planning stage (Don Gilroy, Ministry of Education and Training, personal communication).

AFFORDABILITY

THE COST OF PROVIDING CHILD CARE IN RURAL AREAS

The cost of operating child care programs in rural areas is probably more expensive than urban areas, for the following reasons:

- in 1991, the mean¹ annual salary rate in centre-based programs in Ontario was \$11.38, which translates into approximately \$22,000. per year (The Canadian Child Care Federation/The Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association, 1992). In order to attract and retain trained caregivers for centre programs and as home visitors, rural programs must pay similar salaries to those in urban areas;
- supplies, food, transportation for home visitors, and telephone are more expensive in rural areas than in urban communities (Abramovitch, 1989, Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee, 1990). Small local stores cannot do bulk buying and pass the savings onto the customer. In addition, the cost of transportation from southern suppliers is added to the original cost paid by the store owner. Supplies ordered by a child care program from Toronto have shipping costs added. Telephoning adjacent communities in a rural area may require a long distance call. The distances travelled by home visitors, whose mileage is covered by the child care program, are greater than in an urban area. Rural child care providers interviewed for this paper also pointed out that home visitors cannot supervise as many home child care providers in a large sparsely populated area as they can in a condensed urban situation due to the distances involved and
- low population density in rural areas means that home child care agencies sometimes cannot place as many children in a provider's home as would be possible in an urban situation.

AFFORDABILITY FROM THE PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Currently, in Ontario, parents pay the major cost of operating a child care service, either paying the fee in full or paying part and receiving a subsidy. Determination of what is affordable must take into account the facts that:

- in 1993, across the province as a whole, fees in licensed non-profit centres ranged from \$4,000.00 to \$10,291.00 a year, depending on the child's age (MCSS, unpublished survey); and
- in 1993, fees in rural regulated home child care ranged from \$19.00 to \$25.00 a day, again depending on the child's age (Draper, 1993).

As indicated by Table IV, below, and Table V, on the following page, in 1991/92 an estimated 52.3% of rural families with at least one child under age 12 had an after-tax family income of less than \$40,000.00. Twenty-six percent of rural families with at least one child under age 12 had an

1

The mean refers to the average score on a variable. It is calculated by adding the sum of all the scores on the variable and dividing it by the total number of scores.

after-tax income of less than \$30,000.00. The larger percentage of families with an after-tax income less than \$20,000 in urban areas with a population of 30,000 or more reflects the higher percentage of lone-parent families in larger urban communities. Taking this into account, plus the fact that rural, as defined by Statistics Canada, would include wealthy two-to-five acre estate residential areas such as found in York Region, the larger percentage of all families with an after-tax income of less than \$40,000 in rural areas suggests the probability that after-tax family income in rural communities tends to be lower than in urban areas.

Table IV

Distribution of average after-tax family incomes of families with at least one child less than age 12 by location of residence

Location of residence	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000 to \$29,999	\$30,000 to \$39,999	\$40,000 to \$49,999	\$50,000 or more	TOTAL
Rural and urban less than 2,500	10.2%	15.8%	26.3%	21.2%	26.4%	100%
Urban 2,500 to 29,999	12.7%	14.3%	20.4%	22.0%	30.5%	100%
Urban 30,000 to 99,999	15.9%	14.2%	22.2%	20.7%	27.1%	100%
Urban more than 100,000	14.5%	10.8%	19.1%	18.8%	36.7%	100%

Source: Prepared by the Centre For International Statistics using Statistics Canada's *Survey of Consumer Finances* microdata, 1991 and 1992.

The *Survey of Consumer Finances* is conducted annually and contains approximately 11,000 respondents from Ontario. In Table IV, the data for two years, 1991 and 1992, have been combined into a single aggregated data set in order to increase the sample size and provide a more accurate estimate based on it.

Table V

Percentage of families with at least one child less than age 12 by location of residence with an after-tax income at four different levels

Location of residence	Less than \$20,000	Less than \$30,000	Less than \$40,000	Less than \$50,000
Rural and urban less than 2,500	10.2%	26.0%	52.3%	73.5%
Urban 2,500 to 29,999	12.7%	27.0%	47.4%	69.4%
Urban 30,000 to 99,999	15.9%	30.1%	52.3%	73.0%
Urban more than 100,000	14.5%	25.3%	44.4%	63.2%

100,000				
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Source: Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada's *Survey of Consumer Finances* microdata, 1991 and 1992.

Note: In order to obtain the percentage for the column "less than \$30,000" the columns less than \$20,000 and \$20,000 to \$29,999 from Table IV were added. The same approach was used to obtain the percentages in the other columns.

The suggestion that family income in rural areas is likely to be lower than in urban areas with a population greater than 2,500 is supported by the data in Table VI, on the following page. This table shows that the standard deviation² in after-tax family incomes is lowest in rural areas and urban areas with a population less than 2,500 and greatest in urban areas with a population of more than 100,000. In other words, the range of incomes is greatest in large urban areas. This may reflect the higher proportion of both lone-parents and high income families in such communities.

Table VI

Standard deviations of after-tax family incomes of families with at least one child less than age 12 by location of residence

Location of residence	After-tax income	Standard deviation
Rural	\$41,160	\$19,085
Urban less than 2,500	\$41,115	\$16,880
Urban 2,500 to 29,999	\$42,600	\$20,375
Urban 30,000 to 99,999	\$40,510	\$21,020
Urban more than 100,000	\$45,500	\$23,945

Source: Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics using Statistics Canada's *Survey of Consumer Finances* microdata, 1991 and 1992.

Income tax deductions can provide some assistance in the cost of child care, however, to take advantage of the federal Child Care Expense Deduction the parent must have receipts. The maximum deduction for receipted child care expenses in 1993 is \$5,000.00 for each child under age seven or for each disabled child up to age 14. The maximum deduction for school age children up to age 14 is \$3,000.00 per child. It must be noted that these are deductions to the amount of tax that would otherwise be paid. Therefore, depending on income, the actual amount of money obtained may be less than 500.00 even though the parent may have spent several thousand for care for the child in question.

2

The square root of the arithmetic average of the squares of the deviations from the mean in a frequency distribution. The bigger the standard deviation, the greater the deviation (or range) in the distribution of numbers.

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