

DEVELOPMENTS IN WORK-RELATED CHILD CARE

by Joan Evans

Joan Evans is a project officer with the Women's Trade Union Commission in Sydney. Among its other functions, the W.T.U.C. is encouraging a growing interest in work-related child care.

The child care centre at the Eden Park Industrial Estate, North Ryde, is currently the only centre established by a developer and in receipt of federal funding under the Children's Services Program.

The success of the Eden Park centre, which has been incorporated as an integral part of the design of the industrial complex, has caused the centre to be the focus of the growing interest in the concept of work-related child care by such groups as commercial concerns, unions, local government and other public authorities.

Much of the present promotion of work-related child care is related to the sustained educational program the Women's Trade Union Commission has maintained for the past 3½ years. Unions are accepting that they should be involved in welfare issues for both male and female workers, and are recognising that work-related child care gives benefits to all workers. Equal opportunities officers in some public utilities are also involved in promoting the concept of work-related child care to management and workers.

In the experience of the Women's Trade Union Commission an

encouraging number of industrialists are sympathetically disposed towards making provision for work-related child care. However, they indicate that they find the bureaucratic processes, demanded by federal, state and local governments complex and daunting. Furthermore, while some firms are prepared to bear capital costs, none is prepared to face yearly recurrent costs to staff and maintain a work-related children's centre.

Unions and industries' enthusiasm to be involved in children's services will dissipate if they are continually faced with these complexities. To ensure that this does not occur, people should be employed by the Federal Government to co-ordinate responses and to facilitate progress through the government structures.

The role that local government can play in fostering the acceptance and the ultimate realisation of this model of child care in as many appropriate locations as possible, should be recognised. Councils can be encouraged to draw up area codes which require that the development applications for large commercial/industrial complexes will take cognisance of the social and welfare needs of the work community as well as those of the community in which

they are to be situated.

In N.S.W. sympathetic councils will soon be able to use provisions in the new Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. If local councils are satisfied that a development will or is likely to require the provision of, or increase the demand for, public amenities and public services, the councils may impose conditions upon the development application requiring either the dedication of land free of cost or the payment of a monetary contribution, or both. Work-related child care comes within the Act's ambit.

Encouraging though this may be with those councils already on side, it nevertheless remains for those who believe that work-based child care should be an option available to parents in the paid work force, to continue demonstrating the child care needs of these parents to all local councils. For many this has been a neglected area of social concern. Furthermore, councils need to be shown that the communality of interest that may be represented within the work-place is a legitimate basis for the provision there of child care.

These are the developments in work-related child care for the present. While the signs are not propitious for this concept to be everywhere, the expectations are for more work-related children's centres somewhere in the near future.