

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD DAY CARE UNDER JEWISH AUSPICES IN THE GREATER PHILADELPHIA COMMUNITY

NORMAN S. FINKEL

Retired Executive Vice President, Federation Day Care Services, Philadelphia

Child day care under Jewish auspices has been provided in Philadelphia for over a century, making Philadelphia a pioneer in this field among American Jewish communities. This summary history traces significant factors in the growth and development of this communal service, highlighting the experiences of Federation Day Care Services (FDCS), the agency designated by the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia (formerly the Federation of Jewish Agencies) as the primary federation agency charged with providing child day care for the Jewish community.

FDCS has been fortunate to receive support from both the Jewish and broader communities. Many people have helped shape it and have contributed to its success. In particular, agency board members and staff as well as members of federation's board and the staff of its community planning department facilitated the growth and development of FDCS.

BEGINNINGS

Child day care under Jewish auspices in Philadelphia traces its roots to the late nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. Recognizing the need for this service for children of working parents, Jewish women in Center City, South Philadelphia, and North Philadelphia started day care programs in their neighborhoods. The Young Women's Union (YWU) began a day care program in 1893 in Center City and later relocated it to South Philadelphia. The YWU subsequently merged with Neighborhood Centre, a Jewish community center, which assumed responsibility for the day nursery. The Downtown Hebrew Day Nursery (Downtown) was founded in South Philadel-

phia in 1910. Downtown was followed by the Strawberry Mansion Hebrew Day Nursery (Strawberry Mansion) and Northern Hebrew Day Nursery (Northern), which were started in North Philadelphia in the early 1920s. These programs were all located within a fifteen mile radius of Center City.

All of the child day care programs were similar in many ways. Organized to serve the Jewish community, primarily immigrant parents who needed to work because of the "death, disability or desertion of a spouse or a divorce" (*Records 1896-1967*, p. 1) these programs provided care for infants, toddlers, preschool, and elementary school aged children. They were staffed by untrained volunteers who had to be "willing to mind the children," according to agency records (*FDCS Board Manual*, 1979). The YWU raised funds to maintain its day nursery program before it merged with Neighborhood Centre. Northern depended on fundraising auxiliaries it organized to support the day nursery. Downtown and Strawberry Mansion struggled to "keep the day nursery alive," as one board member put it, by door-to-door solicitations and donated food from neighborhood pushcart owners. Eventually, it was apparent to the boards of both day nurseries that their efforts were falling short. This was the determining factor in their respective decisions to join the Federation of Jewish Charities, Downtown in 1923 and Strawberry Mansion in 1927. The two day care programs also became member agencies of the United Fund, now the United Way.

As the day care agencies responded to the needs of their respective communities, they sought to improve the services they provided to the children and their families. They employed paid teachers, some of whom had

formal pedagogic credentials, and broadened the program of activities.

JEWISH DAY CARE DEVELOPS SUPPORT IN THE ORGANIZED JEWISH COMMUNITY

After World War II, the boards of Strawberry Mansion, Downtown, and Northern began to attract native-born Jewish women and some men, many of whom were active in federation. They felt that becoming board members of the day care agencies provided them with an opportunity to make a contribution to the Jewish community. The newcomers to the boards of Downtown and Strawberry Mansion heralded a significant change in the make-up of those boards. In contrast to the immigrant women who had started the agencies and conversed primarily in Yiddish, most of the new board members, several generations removed from their immigrant roots, spoke little or no Yiddish.

The long-time board members were ambivalent about the newcomers. Though they recognized the need to pass the mantle of board leadership to a new generation of board members, the transition was not easy. Anna Frigond, the executive director of Strawberry Mansion, recalled that, when the longtime board members expressed their resistance to ideas proposed by the newcomers, most of whom lived in the suburbs and not in the neighborhoods in which the programs were located, they did so in disparaging Yiddish. When she was asked what was being said, she chose to translate very loosely and diplomatically in order to avoid conflicts in the developing working relationship between the old and the new (Anna Frigond, personal communication, 1965–1966).

These agencies expanded to meet the need for day care in the Jewish and in the general community, which was primarily the result of the growing number of women in the work force because of the war effort. Though the programs were administered under Jewish auspices and located in neighborhoods with a substantial Jewish populations, intake became nonsectarian. In June 1954,

following changes in the make-up of the community, Northern Hebrew Day Nursery relocated to the Logan neighborhood in North Philadelphia, bordering Northeast Philadelphia. This was the beginning of the gradual move of the Jewish community to Northeast Philadelphia and the suburbs.

After the war, Neighborhood Centre closed its day care program, citing a declining need. The Downtown Hebrew Day Nursery, renamed the Downtown Children's Center and the Strawberry Mansion Hebrew Day Nursery, renamed the Strawberry Mansion Day Care Center, continued to function.

In the 1950s, the Jewish federation, concerned about whether there would be a need for day care in the future, considered closing those two programs. Anna Frigond recalled that some of the male board members of federation took the position that "a woman's place was in the home" and proposed giving parents with children enrolled in day care a one-time cash grant to help them in the event the day care centers closed (Anna Frigond, personal communication, 1965–1966). This thinking reflected a point of view about the role of women in American culture. Yet, the original reasons for the establishment of day care programs still existed. In the years following World War II and in the decade of the 1950s, women were working primarily for economic reasons. In addition, the labor market, locally and nationally, was expanding. The boards of both day care agencies had ample arguments to make the case that day care was a needed service and pointed to full enrollment and waiting lists. The federation, following its review of the need for day care in the Jewish community in 1959, made the decision to continue to support day care. Further, it planned to provide day care in Northeast Philadelphia, which now had a growing Jewish population of young families. In 1966, as a result of federation and board planning, the Strawberry Mansion Center was closed and the Samuel Paley Day Care Center (Paley) was opened in Northeast Philadelphia with an initial enrollment of 100 preschool and school-aged children.

DEVELOPING DAY CARE SERVICES

Day care, as provided by the Samuel Paley Day Care Center, began to realize its potential as a family service agency. It provided children with a preschool educational program geared to their ages and developmental levels, as well as age-appropriate social and recreational programs for elementary school aged children. In keeping with its mission, Paley maintained Jewish content in its program for children, in parent-child activities, and in educational programs for parents. It provided support services for parents, including counseling if indicated or requested, and family life education programs. Parents were encouraged to become actively involved in the center through parent-child activities and through the center's parent association. Many parents made the center part of their social lives during the years their children were in day care.

This approach to service delivery was implemented in practice and incorporated in the mission statement of the agency. It was the philosophical foundation on which Paley developed its programs and services. In the next few years, Paley increased its enrollment to 130 and eventually to 200 children. It also opened several group homes for an after-school program for school-aged children and administered a food service program for children. Paley merged with the Downtown Children's Center in 1973 and was renamed Federation Day Care Services (FDSCS).

FDSCS grew significantly from the end of the 1960s to the mid-1980s. The increase in the number of single-parent families in the community resulted in yet a further growth in the number of women entering the work force, enrolling in training programs, or attending college. Another factor was the gradual increase in the number of families with young children in which both parents worked. As a result, parents at every socioeconomic level sought day care for their children. Full enrollment and waiting lists were commonplace in day care programs throughout the community.

Public funding for day care was also a significant factor in helping Paley, and later FDSCS, expand in the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, federal and state funding became available through the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), partially underwriting the cost of day care for children of parents who met these criteria for what the Department called "subsidized day care": parents (1) had to be employed or seeking employment, (2) needed to earn at or below the defined poverty level or above the poverty level but within a range described as "low income working poor," (3) were on welfare and seeking employment, or (4) were enrolled in federally approved training programs or attending college. Titles IV-A and XX of the Social Security Act, as well as DPW allocations, provided the initial funding for the Subsidized Day Care Program.

FDSCS and a small number of other social agencies had direct contracts with DPW to provide subsidized day care for eligible children in Philadelphia. The agency's ability to respond to the need for day care was helped through its broadened sources of funding, which included fees paid by parents, state and federal funding, the agency's federation allocation, board and auxiliary fundraising, and foundation grants.

In addition to its year-round day care program for school-aged children, FDSCS established a summer day camp program on the premises of Paley for school-aged children enrolled year-round and the school-aged brothers and sisters of preschool children. Camp hours were from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm to meet the needs of working parents.

The agency also developed an early intervention program. Its purpose was to provide day care in a therapeutic setting for preschool children who were emotionally vulnerable or developmentally delayed and whose parents met the agency's criteria for the enrollment of their children in day care. Another program developed by FDSCS was a Child Personal Safety Program, administered agency wide, which taught children to cope with the threatening behavior of adults. The

FDCS program of Jewish education also was expanded and continued to be an integral component of agency service.

The community's recognition of the increasing importance of day care was reflected in the changing composition of the board of FDCS. For many years the board of the agency was disparagingly described as a "women's board," but in the 1970s and 1980s it attracted an increasing number of men. During those decades, four men assumed the presidency at the agency.

In the late 1970s, two developments occurred that had an important impact on the ability of the Jewish community to respond to the need for day care. A federation agency, the Association for Jewish Children, which only served Jewish children, was able to tap federal funds for subsidized day care by initiating the Northeast Interfaith Consortium (NIC), a consortium made up of Catholic Social Services and Episcopal Community Services, and itself. The Consortium started a family day care program for infants, toddler, preschool, and school-aged children. Each agency administered and supervised its own sectarian family day care enrollment of children referred from the NIC's central intake, which was nonsectarian. FDCS administered its own family day care program and became a member of the Consortium in the 1990s.

The other development was the merger of Northern with FDCS in 1978. FDCS built a day care center in the Northeast in 1978 on the grounds of the Myer and Rosaline Feinstein Campus. It then built its central administration building adjacent to that day care center.

In the late 1970s and 1980s FDCS opened several new day care centers and school-age mini-branches in the Northeast. Two such centers were opened at synagogues. All of these programs were located in a 10-mile radius of Paley.

FDCS opened a Center City Branch in 1984 after a survey conducted by the Philadelphia chapter of the American Jewish Committee indicated the need for a Center

City Jewish day care facility. FDCS renovated a storefront in that neighborhood in accordance with the building and licensing code for day care. The center provided services to infants, toddlers, and preschool children. Services to parents included a family life education program. A second program was opened, in Center City in 1987, and these branches were consolidated in 1989.

With the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980, federal funds for day care and income eligibility criteria for subsidized day care were frozen. The failure to adjust income criteria to reflect inflation gradually reduced the number of children eligible for subsidized day care and reduced subsidized enrollment.

Frozen public funding and relatively flat federation allocations in those years prompted FDCS to begin fundraising efforts to support itself. In the early 1980s, FDCS mounted a Capital Funds Campaign, its first concerted fundraising effort since the construction of the Paley building. Board members were expected not only to become involved in the development of agency policies but also to support the agency financially. They paid dues, made pledges to the endowment fund and, in some instances, endowed programs.

To increase income further, the agency also changed the way fees were charged. FDCS had traditionally administered an agency-wide sliding fee scale based on family income and the number of people in the family. In the mid-1980s, however, FDCS compressed its fee scale into three tiers with the highest tier being comparable to fees charged in the market. Parents had to apply for financial assistance if they felt they could not afford the tier fee charged. To help parents in economic straits, FDCS increased its efforts to raise scholarship funds.

ROLE OF FDCS LOCALLY, STATEWIDE, AND NATIONALLY

Reflecting its commitment to quality child day care, FDCS took an active role in the field of day care, locally, statewide, and na-

tionally. It played an important role in the development of the Child Welfare League of America's standards for day care and in the Pennsylvania day care regulations. Through its input, FDCS also helped shape the welfare department's administrative policies for child care. FDCS staff members sat on local, state, and national day care task forces. It advocated actively for accessible, affordable day care and the importance of educationally qualified caregivers. FDCS staff members also presented regularly at local, state, and national child care and early childhood conferences.

In the 1980s, with federation support, FDCS began to expand into the suburbs to address their needs for day care. It opened centers at synagogues and in a Solomon Schechter Day School. In 1985, it purchased and renovated a former synagogue building for day care. These centers provided full-day, half-day, full-week, and part-week programs to better meet the needs of parents. Some centers provided infant care as well.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the total enrollment of FDCS averaged between 900 and 1,000 children of whom 80% were subsidized.

THE CHANGING DAY CARE LANDSCAPE

The late 1980s saw significant changes in day care that had a profound effect on FDCS and day care in general. One such change was the rapid growth of day care programs, both full and part time, in response to the continuing need of single-parent families and the increasing need of dual-career families for day care. New programs started up under a variety of auspices, both for profit and non-profit. Au pairs and nannies were also becoming viable day care options for parents who could afford them. The competition for children was fierce. Marketing strategies became one of the staples of child care conference agendas.

This growth in day care services was also supported by significant changes in DPW public policy. In 1989, DPW eliminated con-

tracts for subsidized day care and established a city-wide office to process intake applications and the enrollment of eligible children in the center or family day care program chosen by the parents. The watchword at DPW was "parent choice."

The changes in public policy as well as increased competition, resulted in a gradual but significant decrease in FDCS enrollment. Though non-subsidized enrollment increased, it did not make up for the loss in the number of subsidized children enrolled.

In addition, the Center City Jewish community was shrinking as Jewish families with young children moved to the suburbs. Northeast Philadelphia continued to maintain a significant Jewish population primarily because of the number of Soviet Jewish families immigrating to Philadelphia who chose to live there.

These developments prompted the agency, supported by the Jewish federation to initiate a strategic planning process that would consider the ramifications of recent developments in day care and demographic changes in the Jewish community. Through the strategic planning process, the FDCS board reaffirmed (1) its commitment to providing quality day care as a family service, (2) the priority of providing day care in communities with a significant Jewish population, and (3) its commitment to serve the broader community.

The FDCS board recognized that, for a large number of parents, including Jewish parents, location and affordability were the primary reasons in the choice of a child care program, more important than the Jewish auspices or the quality of care provided. It also recognized that for Jewish parents who were not involved in the Jewish community, the enrollment of their children at FDCS was a possible entry point for them into the Jewish community. With these considerations in mind, the FDCS board closed under-enrolled programs and opened new ones in suburban communities with a growing Jewish population.

The enrollment of the agency in 2001

numbered 711 children. Of these 80% were non-subsidized and 20 percent were publicly subsidized. Jewish enrollment ranged between 60 to 85 percent in those centers located in communities with a significant population of Jewish families with young children.

CONCLUSION

The history of day care under Jewish auspices in the Philadelphia community reflects the Jewish community's investment in meeting the needs of its families. Many of the factors noted in the Philadelphia experience in child day care can serve to inform the experiences of other communities. These factors include (1) the gradual consolidation of day care agencies, (2) the increasing emphasis on child day care as a continuing

need, (3) fiscal challenges based on the waxing and waning of governmental subsidies, (4) the need for day care agencies to seek independent funding, and (5) the responsibility of such agencies to address the needs of new neighborhoods and suburbs within the community. Philadelphia is thus a good example of the developments, changes, challenges, and approaches to Jewish child day care and, to the extent that its programs have developed effective methods for addressing common problems, it may also serve as a useful model for other communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges with appreciation the assistance of Maddy Malis, executive director of FDCS, and the help provided by its central administration staff, in particular, Renee Cross.