Chapter 3
Citizen Action, Civil Servants, and Municipal Initiatives Lead the Way

DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN 1945 AND THE EARLY 1960S

The preceding chapter demonstrated that no significant challenge was mounted to the conservative gender order in Alberta society during World War II, despite the widespread employment of married women and the vigorous lobbying for day nurseries by groups in Edmonton and Calgary. In the years of “normality” immediately after the end of the war, women were expected to exit the paid labour force after marriage, and married women with young children were expected to be the primary caregivers for those children. In 1951 only 21,000 of the 63,000 females in Alberta’s paid labour force were married. This group of 21,000 constituted merely 10 percent of all of the married women in Alberta (table 3.1).1

Among those who supported the establishment of wartime day nurseries in Alberta were proponents of a public system of education for preschool children. As noted in the last chapter, such a system received editorial support from the Calgary Herald in 1944. This high-profile endorsement reflected the strength of the movement for public kindergartens in Calgary in the mid-1940s. The Calgary Board of Education responded to this movement and expanded its kindergarten programs from one in the early 1940s to twelve in 1947 (LaGrange 1991, 109). Consequently, although the agitation for wartime day nurseries did not yield a day nursery in Calgary, it did contribute to the establishment of a significant public kindergarten system. The Calgary Board established relatively high standards for its kindergartens that were supported by grants from the province’s Department of Education (LaGrange 1991, 109; Prochner 2000, 37).

The situation in Edmonton in the late 1940s and early 1950s was quite different. The Edmonton Creche and Day Nursery Society continued to operate...
the charitable day nursery it had first established in 1930, supported by the
Edmonton Community Chest, the municipal government, and private donors.
Yet no public kindergartens were established in Edmonton schools in the years
after World War II. As a consequence, Edmonton parents looking for a kinder-
garten had to turn to unregulated, private programs. One such program, oper-
ated on a commercial basis, was offered at the Edmonton College Inc. This

Table 3.1 Demographic and Labour Force Changes in Alberta, 1946 to 1971

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<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>1,463</td>
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<tr>
<td>% urbanized</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calgary</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>403</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edmonton</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>438</td>
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<tr>
<td>Together, as % of total Alberta population</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lethbridge</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicine Hat</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red Deer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grande Prairie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Together, as % of total Alberta population</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newborns to 4 year olds</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>180</td>
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<td>152</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total Alberta population</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 to 9 year olds</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>180</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total Alberta population</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorces per 100,000 people</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>225</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lone-parent families</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of all families</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Females in labour force</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>244</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation rate</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total labour force</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married women in labour force</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of married women</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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NOTE: All raw numbers are in thousands.

a Bowness, Forest Lawn, and Montgomery are included with Calgary for years prior to annexation.
b Beverly and Jasper Place are included with Edmonton for years prior to annexation.
business had established day nursery and kindergarten divisions in 1935 and had argued in 1943 that a wartime day nursery in Edmonton was unnecessary because the Edmonton College could absorb the increased demand for day care from mothers employed in war industries. In 1951, when the building provided gratis to the Creche by the city government was condemned by the fire marshal and the Creche was looking for a new home, Edmonton College Inc. argued that there was no need for the Creche to continue since the Edmonton College could accommodate all of its children.2

After temporarily closing in 1951, the Edmonton Creche reopened in another city-owned building. However, the debate about the future of the Creche in 1951 demonstrated the strength of the conviction of those who opposed the use of public funds to extend the availability of day care. The suggestion that the Creche be relocated to the city’s recreation building provoked a letter to city hall from the president of the Edmonton Table Tennis Club, which operated out of that building. He maintained that the Creche did not need a large space since it should be limited to serving children “who have an irresponsible parent.” Furthermore, he argued that “many of the people” who had been using the Creche found it to be “a convenience but could make other adequate working arrangements if that convenience were not available.”3

A second citizen wrote to a City of Edmonton commissioner after reading a letter to the editor of the Edmonton Journal by the president of the Association of Creche Parents, Anne Fairchild. At the time, the Creche was temporarily closed and the children were in new care situations. “Some of the arrangements are not too bad,” wrote Fairchild, “but most of them are not very good, and the mothers are just about at the end of their rope.” Her message was that “the need for a new Creche—a day nursery—is terrible and urgent and immediate.” It was another section of Anne Fairchild’s letter that raised the ire of Katherine Moar, who dashed off a letter to the commissioner that same day. In appealing for public support, Fairchild wrote, “Those of you who are parents, perhaps, can understand wives who work to help their husbands build a home, or to help them through university. These are the parents and these are the children who use the Creche.” Katherine Moar underlined these sentences in the newspaper clipping she attached to the letter she wrote to the commissioner.

Moar maintained that it was a “grave misuse” of public funds if the city was providing day care subsidies to “parents buying a house or with a member of the family attending University.” She also questioned the priorities of the mothers in such families: “Perhaps if the Creche remained closed for a time it might
force a mother to put her child’s welfare ahead of a personal financial gain.” The city’s commissioners replied that until recently, they too had held the “view that only those mothers who were widows or deserted wives should be accommodated, and not those cases where both parents were working.” However, after further inquiry, they had determined “that many of the cases where both parents were working were even more in need of help than some of the others.” They concluded by reassuring Kathleen Moar “that despite the words you have underlined ... each case that was cared for at the Creche was a proper one and worthy of support.” This response continued to portray subsidized day care as a targeted welfare service but argued that some two-income families were so poor that they deserved the public subsidy along with lone-parent families.4

In Calgary, the movement for public preschool education suffered a significant reversal in 1954 when the Calgary Public School Board stopped offering kindergarten classes. This decision was made one year after the provincial government discontinued grants to support kindergartens (LaGrange 1991, 109) and has been attributed to “overcrowding in schools, a shortage of teachers, and a study by a local academic who concluded that the benefits of kindergarten do not last beyond grade 4” (Seguin 1977, 58, cited in Prochner 2000, 37). The population pressures on the school system in the 1950s were caused by the economic boom after the discovery of oil at Leduc in 1947 and the postwar baby boom. Overall, Calgary’s population grew by 91 percent between 1946 and 1956 (table 3.1) while the number of junior elementary school children (five to nine years old) increased by an astounding 200 percent (from approximately 6,000 to 18,000).5

Even though they were closed in 1954, Calgary public school kindergartens had a long-term impact on the development of private kindergartens, nursery schools, and day cares in the city. This is because “there was a carry-over of standards from public school kindergartens to the private kindergartens that developed to take their place following their closure” (Olsen 1955, cited in Prochner 2000, 37). An important reason for the carry-over of standards was that the Public School Board assisted parents in establishing community-run kindergartens (Seguin 1977, 59, cited in Prochner 2000, 37). The high standards of the community-run programs put competitive and professional pressures on commercial operators of preschool programs to offer similar high standards. At this time, and carrying on into the 1960s, commercial operators would often combine half-day and full-day programs for older (four- and five-year-old) and younger (two- and three-year-old) children, and might call their service a nursery school, a day nursery, and/or a kindergarten.
Sheila Campbell confirmed the generally high standards of kindergarten/preschool programming in Calgary in the late 1950s and early 1960s. She graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Alberta in 1952. After teaching at the junior high and senior high levels in Edmonton, Campbell left the paid labour force in the mid-1950s to look after her young children. At that time, she joined a recent-graduates’ study group organized by the University Women’s Club. With the day care situation in Edmonton in the news in 1956 and 1957, this group selected day care as a study issue. This experience sparked Sheila Campbell’s life-long involvement in early childhood education (ECE) and day care in Alberta. Campbell attributed the difference between the standards of private kindergartens in Edmonton and Calgary in the 1950s and 1960s to differences in the training of the operators:

We always felt that there was a difference between Calgary and Edmonton in that Calgary had a more knowledgeable early childhood community because there were a number of kindergarten people from the United States in Calgary.... There were these private kindergartens and they were good kindergartens. They knew what kindergarten programming was, they came out of the kindergarten tradition in the States.... And I think when they started day care they had some idea of what kids needed. That was not true in Edmonton.6

Alberta changed in dramatic ways in the fifteen years after the end of World War II. Not only did the population increase by over half a million people, but it also shifted from being predominantly rural to predominantly urban (table 3.1). Indeed, by 1961 a majority of Albertans lived in the province’s five largest cities. Furthermore, between 1951 and 1961, the participation rate of married women in the labour force jumped from 10 percent to 26 percent. Much of the increased demand for child care in the latter half of the 1950s came from married women with young children.

Beginning in the mid-1950s and carrying over into the early 1960s, a great deal of investigation took place into the need for governmental involvement in day care in Edmonton. One study was initiated in 1956 by Alderman Lorette Douglas, who reported to city council that she had received a number of requests for the establishment of a day nursery in the south of the city (the existing creche was located in the downtown area on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River). This led to a study conducted by a special committee struck by the Council of Community Services that included Alderman Douglas. This committee made
three recommendations in the fall of 1957. First, the existing creche could accommodate the demand from lone-parent families and from two-parent families facing “drastic economic circumstances.” Second, the growing demand for day care from other two-parent families “could be met by commercially operated day nurseries—provided these establishments meet adequate standards set for their operation.” And, third, the City of Edmonton should begin licensing any premise where even one child was being looked after for a fee, and the licensing requirements should “incorporate the standards of day care as laid down by the Child Welfare League of America.” This last recommendation was never acted upon since the province, not the city, had licensing and regulatory authority.7

One of the most distinctive features of this era of day care politics in Alberta was the intense involvement of a number of groups of professional women. In addition to the University Women’s Club, which made its first submission on day care to the provincial government in June 1958, two other such groups were active in Edmonton at this time. The Study Group on Family Welfare Services—led by Marg Norquay, a minister’s wife who held an MA degree in sociology from the University of Toronto—conducted a study on day care in 1960.8 A third group was based at St. Paul’s United Church and led by Anne Lightfoot; among its accomplishments was the creation of a study guide on day care for United Church women’s groups.

During these years, Sheila Campbell participated in all three Edmonton groups and also began her association with the Canadian Committee on Early Childhood. She offered the following explanation for the involvement of professional women in day care advocacy at that time:

I think we felt some obligation to do something in the community. I think we wanted some interest outside the home. We were all of us at that time stay-at-home moms. I think we just had to have something else in your life, especially professional women. We’d all been doing professional things, then all of a sudden you’re not doing them. This is a way to do something that’s rather meaningful. Like there were also book groups for reading, but this is more meaningful. I think the University Women’s Club itself had had an orientation towards that kind of activity, more meaningful kind of activity than bridge playing and so on.9

The University Women’s Club’s submission to the provincial government in 1958 was based upon a study of child care offered through advertisements in
the Edmonton Journal. Until this time, the province had not enforced its requirement that facilities caring for four or more children be licensed, and, as a consequence, only one of the fifty-four businesses surveyed in 1958 held a license. In 1959, in response to continued lobbying by the University Women’s Club, the province promised to license all day nurseries and to investigate those that advertised child care services (Campbell 2001, 86). This is the main reason that the number of licensed day cares jumped from five in 1960 to twenty-nine in 1961 (table A.1).

In the autumn of 1960, the study group led by Marg Norquay “noticed a large increase in the number of advertisements for child care” in the Edmonton Journal. In a one-month period, they identified 165 unduplicated advertisements. They visited seventeen of the advertisers, but only eight were caring for children. The study group reported the following observations:

Only one of these had adequate indoor and outdoor play equipment. One had twenty children in a room 12 x 14. Another ... had babies lying on a bare floor, unattended, in a small empty room. Yet another had babies, blue with cold, in cribs without blankets.

The study group was particularly concerned that babies were being “cared for in numbers too large to permit any individualized care.” In 1960 the group members followed what was then the conventional interpretation of John Bowlby’s research on children institutionalized during World War II: “that it is essential for young children and babies under three years of age to have the constant and consistent mothering of one person, that the child recognizes as belonging specifically to him.” Consequently, they concluded in a somewhat alarmist fashion, “It is not too much to suggest that many of the day nurseries in Edmonton may be producing the Mental Hospital patients and juvenile delinquents of tomorrow.”

By 1961 day care advocates had at least succeeded in getting the provincial government to assume its responsibility to regulate and monitor day cares and other facilities for young children (albeit not as thoroughly or conscientiously as the advocates would have liked). In 1960 the province hired a civil servant, Frances Ferguson, to take charge of the area, and in 1961 the first set of standards for day care was issued (Campbell 2001, 86). That same year, a law was passed that gave the province the power to revoke licenses and steps were taken to return responsibility for kindergartens to the Department of Education.
1963 more substantial standards for day cares were issued (Campbell 2001, 86), and the Welfare Homes and Institutions Branch of the Department of Public Welfare was established. At this time, the only qualification for staff was that they be “sympathetic to the children’s welfare.” The minimum staff-to-child ratios were set at one to twenty for children between two and seven years of age, and one to ten for children less than two years old.13

By 1961 the populations of Edmonton and Calgary were 321,000 and 276,000, respectively. In the province as a whole, approximately one-quarter of the population was under the age of ten years (table 3.1). With 77,000 married women in the Alberta labour force in 1961, and 23,000 lone-parent families, the care of young children had become an important social issue. In 1960 the Study Group on Family Welfare Services reported, “It has been estimated that at least one thousand preschool children and babies, whose parents are resident in Edmonton, are daily being cared for outside their own homes.”14 At this point, neither the provincial government nor municipal governments took steps toward establishing new day care centres or family day home (FDH) projects. Consequently, the opportunity arose for commercial day care centres to fill the gap and become well established in Alberta’s two major cities.

There were twenty-six licensed day cares in Alberta in 1962 (table A.1). Eight of these centres were located in Edmonton, thirteen in Calgary, and five in other locales. The combined capacity of the twenty-six day cares was 521, for an average of twenty per centre.15 The small aggregate capacity of the licensed centres suggests that the vast majority of families that required preschool care for young children were relying upon family members, friends, neighbours, small FDHS, or unlicensed day cares. The average centre size of twenty suggests that, since some of the licensed centres were home based, a few of these early commercial centres were larger businesses run on a capitalistic basis.

One of the large day care businesses in Calgary in the early 1960s was owned by Kay Wedel and her husband. Their first centre was Happy Times Day Nursery, located in southwest Calgary. Irmtraud Walter immigrated to Canada in 1960 after completing a two-year course in household, young children, and infants in Germany. She started to work for Kay Wedel at Happy Times Day Nursery that fall. The demand for preschool care in Calgary in the early 1960s was so strong that the Wedels decided to open a second facility. They purchased an old United Church and moved the building to a new foundation. Irmtraud Walter worked at the new facility, also located in southwest Calgary, from its opening in 1963 and remembers it having a licensed capacity for 119 children. It was called Fairyland
Kindergarten and Nursery School when it opened (later renamed Fairyland Day Care), and Walter recalls this huge centre being largely full at the time. One reason for its popularity was that Fairyland operated two vans that picked up children from their homes and later returned them. Irmtraud Walter did not like this aspect of the day care, however, since it meant that she rarely got the opportunity to meet the children’s parents. She described Fairyland as a “children’s factory” and commented that it was “too impersonal.” Nevertheless, it was very profitable. The Wedels would later sell Fairyland so that they could devote more attention to a jewellery business and a fast-food outlet.16

THE EDMONTON CRECHE CRISIS SPARKS GOVERNMENT ACTION ON DAY CARE

During the 1940s, proponents of ECE had cast a critical eye at the quality of care offered at Alberta’s only charitable day nursery, the Edmonton Creche. The intense study of day care standards and needs by Edmonton organizations in the late 1950s and early 1960s meant that the practices of the Creche were once again critically scrutinized, apparently with good reason. At a meeting of the Council of Community Services Day Care Committee in 1961, the president of the Creche Board, Mrs. H.H. Stephens, reported that while “at one time they did have a kindergarten teacher … they found that she was no longer needed.” She stated further, “There is also a television set for those who wish to watch it.” It would seem that the program in 1961 was little changed from that in 1955 when “the children’s day consisted of long periods of unstructured play, and routines such as washing, eating, and sleeping” (Prochner 2000, 57). It is little wonder that Stephens was asked at that committee meeting in 1961 “whether attention was paid to the emotional needs as well as the physical needs of the children.”17

The Day Care Committee subsequently raised concerns about “the administration and operation of the Creche” with the executive committee of the Council of Community Services, and in March 1962, the executive committee struck “an exploratory committee” to investigate the concerns. The criticisms voiced by an anonymous source included a single staff member looking after thirty-three children, lack of equipment, over-regimentation of the children, and the failure to employ a social worker to assess the social needs of new applicants. While the exploratory committee issued a report that was quite supportive of the Creche, undoubtedly the Creche’s volunteer board members and its staff felt extremely beleaguered during the investigation.18
On 31 March 1964, the Board of the Edmonton Creche Society made the shocking announcement that it intended to close the Creche in one month’s time. (The board was later convinced to keep running the facility until the end of May.) “Why the sudden antagonism of this 34th Board of the Society to its child, reared over 34 years by 33 previous doting executives and society members?” asked an astute letter writer in the Edmonton Journal. There are two complementary explanations. First, while in previous decades the members of the Creche Board had been held in high esteem for their volunteer contributions to a worthy charity, in the 1960s they had begun to be stigmatized because the Creche did not meet the expectations of those familiar with the best practices in early childhood education and care. In 1968 the Creche president, Mrs. Stephens, looked back at the 1964 decision and stated, “We just got fed up. We had all worked very hard and were getting nothing but abuse for our troubles.”

In 1964 Alberta was at the cusp of redefining how governments should be involved in day care. Although minimal regulatory standards were in place, critics versed in the literature on early childhood programs were questioning whether those standards were adequate. Furthermore, two questions about funding were firmly on the public agenda: Is it a provincial responsibility to fund day care services? If yes, how wide a cross-section of the population should benefit from financial subsidization? The Edmonton Creche had been established in 1930 on a charitable basis to provide custodial care of young children so that female lone parents could take on paid work. In 1964 the members of the Board of the Edmonton Creche were unwilling to rethink this dated and extremely restrictive view of which families deserved help with day care. Their statement justifying the closure assumed that when a husband was fully employed, a wife worked out of choice rather than out of necessity. Consequently, they rejected the notion of subsidized day care for the family with two working parents on the ground that such a “family is maintaining a higher standard of living at public expense.” As far as their traditional clientele was concerned, the Creche Board argued that times had changed and there were now enough commercial centres to look after these children, although the government would have to subsidize this commercial care. In fact, the supply of spaces in licensed commercial centres was very limited in 1964 (see below). Furthermore, the Creche Board ignored the issue of whether commercial centres provided a quality of care worthy of public subsidization. Overall, the main justification for closing the Creche was that “the cost to the general public would be very materially reduced.”
The decision to close the Creche had three effects. First, it put the opponents of publicly funded day care on the defensive because the decision appeared to be so retrograde and small minded. Second, it promoted activism by both working mothers (in the form of a Save the Creche Committee) and community agencies in favour of day care. And, third, it forced the provincial government to decide once and for all whether to become involved in funding day care, even if on a very restricted basis.

In April 1964, the Edmonton Welfare Council (EWC) surveyed the parents of the children then enrolled at the Creche and determined that there was a need for the day nursery to remain open. At the time, Edmonton had only six licensed commercial centres with a total capacity of 130. Since these centres were operating at approximately 90 percent of capacity, they were incapable of absorbing any more than a handful of the more than 120 children who attended the Creche. In light of this information, the EWC, the United Community Fund (UCF), and the City of Edmonton decided to keep the day care going. The day after the Creche’s closure on 31 May, the Community Day Nursery (CDN) opened in the same city-owned location. The Creche Board had been invited to participate in this new day care but refused. Indeed, the animus of the Creche Board was so strong that it refused to allow the reopened facility to use the Creche name, refused to turn over its assets for use in day care, and even promised to remove $4,000 in equipment from the building before turning over possession.

A new building was needed for the CDN, since the existing building would soon be destroyed as part of a downtown redevelopment project. In March 1965, the City of Edmonton, supported by the UCF and the EWC, asked provincial officials to contribute to the capital costs of a new facility and to the ongoing operations of the day care. The discussions with the provincial civil servants in the Department of Public Welfare went very well. By April, tentative agreements with Deputy Minister Duncan Rogers had been reached on cost-sharing programs for a new CDN. The executive director of the EWC, Stewart Bishop, “indicated that Mr. Roger’s reaction was most favourable to day care as it fell within his concept of preventive programs in the public welfare field.”

Day care continued to be viewed with considerable suspicion by members of the Social Credit caucus; even with the deputy minister’s strong support, the matter was not settled. The next step was a meeting between the provincial minister of Public Welfare, L.C. Halmrast, and a delegation from Edmonton that included Mayor Vince Dantzer and the chairs of the boards of the UCF and EWC. Minister Halmrast then took the request to the provincial cabinet, which, in early
June, agreed to help fund the CDN starting in the 1966–67 budget year (a full ten months down the road). The province committed to covering up to $25,000 in renovation costs and one-third of the yearly deficit up to a maximum of $8,000 (with the city and the UCF sharing the remaining two-thirds). Minister Halmrast had to reassure his colleagues about who would receive subsidization before the matter received cabinet approval.25

This was a historic decision because it marked the very first time that the Province of Alberta had agreed to subsidize a day care. Two aspects of the decision are particularly significant. First, even though funds for the CDN were committed prior to the introduction of the Preventive Social Service (PSS) program, it was the idea of day care as a preventive measure that won support from both provincial civil servants and cabinet ministers.26 Second, even though by 1965 a significant minority of married Albertan women were in the paid labour force, Alberta’s political leaders (most of them male) continued to be reluctant to introduce any public policy that could be construed as supporting this development. Indeed, the provincial political elites’ beliefs about gender roles seem to have changed very little during the twenty years since the end of World War II.

The CDN relocated in April 1966 to new premises (an old garage, of all places—the former maintenance shop for the city’s Building Maintenance Department). However, prior to the move—and even for a short time after the move—the CDN continued to be the Edmonton Creche in everything but name due to continuity in staff and child care philosophy. Just prior to the relocation, two studies of day care in Edmonton levelled criticisms at the quality of care in the CDN. The Day Care Planning Committee of the EWC stated, “The number of children enrolled must be reduced, group care for youngsters under age three must be discontinued and staffing must be up-graded.” The Family Service Association (FSA) also criticized the CDN. When the Edmonton Journal reported these criticisms on 23 March 1966, the director of the CDN, Jessie Holmes, immediately resigned. She was a registered nurse and had held the director’s position for four years. Her resignation gave the CDN an opportunity for a fresh start.27

Sheila Campbell was a member of the personnel committee of the Board of the CDN in 1966 and was instrumental in hiring the new director, Mary Hull, who served continuously in this position from August 1966 to March 2001, when the centre closed.28 In 1966 Mary Hull was working in Edmonton at a school for the mentally challenged. A co-worker knew she had trained in preschool teaching in England (after growing up in Scotland) and pointed out the CDN
job advertisement. Her hiring turned child care at the CDN, and throughout Edmonton, in a new direction. Sheila Campbell explained:

Full credit to Mary Hull. She is the person who introduced into this city the concept of a play-oriented program. Nobody knew what it was before.... Day nurseries had been under matrons. They were nurses, they ran them like hospitals, they were sanitary, spotless. They ground up all the food and gave it to the kids ... so nobody would choke.... They were sterile environments. So Mary brought in the play. We all learned from Mary.29

Mary Hull, supported by a sympathetic board, was able to quickly improve the quality of the program at the CDN. Less than a year after her appointment, the FSA wrote, “The conditions and standards at the downtown Community Day Nursery have improved considerably and we feel that this is an important step in the development of quality day care in the city.”30 The Creche era was truly over.

BUILDING THE ANTI-WELFARE-STATE WELFARE STATE

On 1 July 1966, the Preventive Social Services Act came into effect in Alberta. This innovative piece of legislation specified that municipal governments had the option (but not the statutory responsibility) to establish preventive social services in the municipality. The services could be run by the municipality or by a not-for-profit organization. If the province approved a particular program, then it would cover 80 percent of the costs, with the municipality responsible for the remaining 20 percent. For many PSS programs, however, the provincial cost would only be 30 percent of the total because on 15 July 1966, a new federal cost-sharing program, the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), took effect. It transformed how welfare services were funded in the country, with the federal government now paying 50 percent of the cost of approved programs.31

The PSS program was the brainchild of Duncan Rogers, who had been appointed deputy minister of Public Welfare in 1959. It was designed to mute opposition from both municipalities and Social Credit politicians to the centralization of statutory social services in Alberta. Shifting statutory programs from municipalities to the province created efficiencies of scale and meant that welfare services in a province did not vary due to place of residence. “In Alberta,” however, “the trend towards takeover of municipal welfare functions had proceeded
more slowly than in the rest of Canada” (Bella 1978, 154). In the early 1960s, municipal welfare departments in Alberta still administered important aspects of the child welfare system as well as social assistance for employable citizens. Rogers wanted the province to have exclusive responsibility for these two statutory programs.

Internal discussions of preventive services began in 1963 and, in November 1964, Rogers formally asked his minister, L.C. Halmrast, “for permission to begin planning for a takeover of existing municipal welfare programs, and for a program of preventive services” (letter quoted in Bella 1978, 172). The provincial cabinet gave preliminary approval to the plan, and Rogers wrote on 3 March 1965 that “the Department is now committed by the Minister to some action aimed at preventing the dependence on welfare and the deterioration of family life” (173).

To ensure that municipal welfare departments would not organize against his plan, Duncan Rogers held discussions with municipal civil servants in early 1965 (Bella 1978, 59n13). Keith Wass, superintendent of Edmonton’s Welfare Department at the time, recollected that the proposed new division of labour between municipalities and the province was justified by Rogers in these terms: “Now the municipalities are going to provide a preventive, meaningful role, and we’ll pick up the pieces when things break up and so on at the provincial level.”

As a senior civil servant, Duncan Rogers was very familiar with the ideology of Social Credit politicians in Alberta and why they were uncomfortable with centralizing all child welfare and social assistance services in the province. “The Social Credit government’s reluctance to take over municipal programs,” writes Leslie Bella, “was due to their traditional concern for preventing the development of a welfare state, and their longstanding emphasis on municipal autonomy. Social Crediters considered big governments to be evil, and equated the growth and centralization of government with the welfare state, with socialism and with loss of freedom.” The two main features of the PSS program were prevention and municipal responsibility, and both features appealed to the Social Credit world view. Prevention promised to lower the caseloads in statutory welfare programs over the long term, and municipal responsibility for preventive programs promised to counterbalance the increasing social welfare activities of the federal and provincial governments. The virtues of the new PSS program, however, were not enough to overcome reservations in the Social Credit cabinet about the growth of the provincial role in social welfare. As a consequence,
to appease cabinet opponents, Rogers was forced to develop a revised proposal whereby the province would take over all child welfare functions but municipalities would retain responsibility for providing social assistance to employable residents (Bella 1978, 224, 239).

It was relatively easy for municipal governments and the provincial cabinet to support the new PSS program since so much new money was available to each level of government. The municipal windfall was due to municipalities’ diminished financial responsibility for the social assistance program and the complete end of their responsibility for child welfare. “There were opportunities, within the municipal welfare budget,” notes Leslie Bella, “for major program increases without increased burden to the municipal taxpayers” (1978, 112). The provincial windfall occurred because, during the negotiations concerning the terms of the CAP, the federal government agreed to share the costs of many existing programs like child welfare that were formerly funded solely by the provinces (1031124, 140).

It is indubitably the case that Social Credit politicians saw the PSS program as an antidote to the socialistic welfare state they so loathed. Al Hagan moved to Calgary from Saskatchewan in the spring of 1969 to become the city’s first day care counsellor. He recollected that Social Credit cabinet ministers “were enthusiastic supporters of the PSS program. I couldn’t say that they were particularly supportive of day care because there was that sort of old ethic, women should stay at home, and it was kind of wrong to encourage women to be out of the home working.” This hesitation toward day care existed even though Duncan Rogers had listed day care as an example of a possible PSS program as early as 1964 (Bella 1978, 214). Minister Halmrast came around to supporting public investment in day care because it would allow a single mother to get a paid job to support her children rather than be solely dependent on welfare (Bella 1978, 218). This indicates that Halmrast and other Social Credit political leaders in Alberta in the 1960s supported funding day care as a preventive service only to decrease welfare caseloads and costs. As Leslie Bella puts it, “Both day care and welfare were evils to many Social Creditors, but day care was a lesser evil” (1978, 147).

In trying to enforce this narrow view of provincially funded day care, however, Minister Halmrast and his colleagues faced two insurmountable problems inherent in the PSS program. First, “preventive” is a flexible concept with many different meanings. Consequently, the narrow definition of preventive day care preferred by the Social Credit cabinet in 1966 was open to challenge, particularly from social workers employed by municipal governments who were versed
in the professional literature on preventive programs. For instance, the Social Service Department of the City of Edmonton chose to define preventive services in broad terms as “promoting sound general social health, and with the avoidance of specific social problems.”

John Lackey was hired as a social worker by the Province of Alberta in 1961. In 1974 he became the second provincial director of the PSS program. He offered the following insight into the variable definitions of prevention among those who supported the PSS program:

The interesting thing about Preventive Social Services is that it fit most ideological viewpoints, or you could make it fit most ideological viewpoints. The conservative value that people need to be responsible for themselves and help themselves and pull themselves up by their bootstraps, that’s what PSS was. It was local people making their own decision to help themselves, [make] them strong before they get into further trouble, be independent and all that, good fit. It just as easily fit the liberal or socialistic viewpoint because it’s a capacity to provide services to people and support to people. So it cut right across the political spectrum.

Second, by giving municipalities the responsibility for initiating PSS projects, the provincial government created a dynamic in which it was under constant pressure to improve existing preventive social services and introduce new ones, if not from one municipality, then from the next. In the mid-1960s, municipal welfare departments in Alberta employed a number of highly qualified social workers in key positions. As a result, municipal expertise in social work far exceeded provincial expertise. Furthermore, these municipal civil servants saw themselves as having a professional responsibility to advocate for the rights of citizens to high-quality social services. In this regard, Al Hagan observed: “PSS legislation carried with it a very strong mandate for and expectation about advocacy. And you didn’t want to work for Sam Blakely [the director of Calgary’s Social Service Department] if you weren’t an advocate for, in this case, children and early intervention.”

An additional perspective on the significance of municipal initiative was provided by Howard Clifford, who became Edmonton’s first day care director in February 1967. Clifford came to the job with a Master of Social Work degree and the conviction that social programs should be universally available to people. Nevertheless, over time he came to be a strong supporter of the way the PSS
program allowed municipalities to take the lead in establishing high-quality day cares in Alberta. It is highly unlikely that Minister Halmrast and his Social Credit colleagues anticipated the way that demands for provincial government regulation of and spending on day care would be magnified by the powers given to municipalities by the PSS Act. “I saw the Preventive Social Service program as a really excellent one,” stated Howard Clifford in 1996, but was probably not as thrilled about it as I would have been now looking back on it…. The problem with municipal involvement is that if you’ve got a good, progressive municipality you have really good things, if you have a poor one you have nothing. So the discrepancies across the board are really bothersome. And if you’re a universalist … then why would I argue for this kind of thing rather than a provincial program? But my problem with provincial programs, and this comes out of that experience actually, was that it usually becomes the lowest common denominator that is acceptable to the majority. Whereas if you get a progressive one then you’re ahead of everyone else, and that puts leadership pressure on others to accomplish it. I don’t think Calgary would have ever come up with what they did if Edmonton didn’t have that first one, and Medicine Hat either, and Grande Prairie either.37

In passing the PSS Act in 1966, the Social Credit government thought it was on the road to building an alternative to the pernicious welfare state being created in other places in Canada. Ironically, those elements of the PSS Act that were supposed to be anti-welfare state (a preventive focus and municipal responsibility for program initiation) promoted the establishment of day cares throughout Alberta that were exemplars for the Canadian welfare state in the late 1960s and 1970s.

A STRONG MOVEMENT FOR QUALITY DAY CARE IN EDMONTON FORCES THE PROVINCE TO ACCEDER

The decision to close the Edmonton Creche in 1964 turned out to be a propitious turn of events for the development of quality day care in that city. It brought considerable public attention to day care and caused both the city government and social service organizations to undertake fresh assessments of the need for day care. As a consequence, when the PSS Act took effect in mid-1966, Edmonton
already had a plan in place for how it wanted to use PSS funds to expand quality day care services.

The EWC took the lead in planning. It produced a position paper on day care in July 1964 and struck a Day Care Planning Committee in September 1964. The planning committee was not very active over the next eight months while the long-term future of the CDN was the focus of the efforts of the city, the EWC, and the UCF. However, in April 1965, the committee dedicated itself to studying “the need for day care services of employed mothers in Edmonton.” Its report was presented to the Board of the EWC in December 1965.38

The conclusions of the report were based upon a survey of 512 employed women with children aged five years or less. Based upon the survey results, the planning committee estimated that there were 7,110 preschool children who required care while their mothers were at work. In May 1965, only 379 licensed spaces were available in day cares in Edmonton, meaning that “for every 20 preschool aged youngsters whose mothers work, licensed accommodation is available for one child.” The committee concluded that more community day cares were needed in Edmonton and recommended that the first priority should be the establishment of “an experimental community group day care facility in the suburban ring of the City.” It is noteworthy that, like the advocates for wartime day nurseries in Alberta, the planning committee felt compelled to address the dominant societal belief that mothers of young children should not work outside the home. The committee appealed to pragmatism and echoed the argument made by the University Women’s Club of Calgary in 1943: “The over-riding question confronting Edmonton today is not whether mothers of young children should work—in fact they are, and in increasing numbers—but rather that child care arrangements are required to serve adequately the children of employed mothers.”39

While significant in its own right, this report was doubly significant because it sparked an important series of investigative reports in the Edmonton Journal by Karen Harding. Harding and fellow reporter Catherine Carson interviewed the members of the Day Care Planning Committee on 20 December 1965. This led to a story by Harding in the paper’s Family section that echoed the information and conclusions of the planning committee. A follow-up story the next day contrasted the “custodial care” that was the standard in commercial day care in Edmonton with the elements of a quality program of care. For these two articles, Karen Harding had visited a number of Edmonton’s commercial day cares, and she reported that the treatment of the children in these centres was wanting. She
concluded her second article by quoting Marjorie Bowker, an Edmonton lawyer who would soon thereafter be appointed as a juvenile and family court judge. In arguing for “much higher standards” in day cares, Bowker deployed the familiar pragmatic rationale to try and disarm opposition from those who objected to mothers working outside the home: “Whether we approve in principle of working mothers or not, the trend in this direction will not be reversed by ignoring the plight of the children involved.”

Harding’s two stories were modest in scope and length, but they were noteworthy because they involved independent investigative reporting on commercial day cares and were written to support the push for more high-quality community day cares in the city. Indeed, the stories established the Edmonton Journal as one of the leading advocates for quality day care in the province. The paper continued to demonstrate its editorial commitment to the issue by flying Karen Harding to Toronto to observe what occurred in that city’s subsidized day cares. Her subsequent report highlighted the superiority of the care in Toronto’s subsidized centres compared to that in Edmonton’s centres, including the CDN.

One of the unusual features of the day care politics in Edmonton in 1966 was an intense rivalry between the FSA of Edmonton and the Welfare Department of the City of Edmonton (supported by the EWC) over who should take charge of the development of new community day cares in Edmonton. Since both organizations favoured high-quality day cares, the rivalry served to reinforce this position in public discourse. For instance, in March 1966, the FSA released its own study of the need for day care in Edmonton as a rejoinder to the EWC study released the previous December. The FSA study featured a survey of the child care arrangements and needs of the employees of the Great Western Garment Company, which then employed over twelve hundred women. The FSA study reported that the company had a turnover of 157 percent in 1965. “A large proportion” of the turnover was attributed to the employees not earning enough to pay for reliable babysitters and being forced to quit when an unreliable babysitter let them down. Disruptions in child care arrangements were also estimated to cause hundreds of hours of absenteeism every week. A survey of employees resulted in the conclusion that there was enough demand to locate a new day care centre near the plant.

On 4 July 1966, the commissioners of the City of Edmonton (two civil servants and Mayor Vince Dantzer) recommended “the establishment of day care as a priority preventive social service to be developed at both the private and public levels.” They further recommended that the initiative be led by the city, not
the FSA, and that the city immediately hire a director of day care. Significantly, besides being responsible for policy, administration, planning, inspection, and staff training, the director was to engage in “public education on day care generally.” As a concession to the opponents of public funding of day care, the commissioners added, “In part this would be aimed at encouraging mothers to stay home with preschool children.”

The movement for quality child care in Edmonton was relatively strong at this point, and a second not-for-profit day care, the O’Connell Institute, opened in August 1966. It was initially operated by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity with the support of the UCF. The following summer, it was reorganized on a non-sectarian basis, renamed Primrose Place Day Care, and given funding through the PSS program. Primrose Place’s director was Ellen Derksen, a social worker who at that time simultaneously served as the chair of the admissions committee at the CDN.

In the fall of 1966, the city placed advertisements across Canada for a director of day care, but these advertisements “failed to bring suitable candidates” because of “the shortage of personnel in this field.” The position was only filled after Keith Wass convinced Howard Clifford, over a couple of lunch meetings, to take the job. Clifford, who like Wass held an MSW degree, was then the director of social services for the psychiatric hospital in Edmonton. While in this position, he had begun experimenting with the use of FDHS to ease the child care burden on mothers who were leaving the hospital and returning to their families. Nevertheless, he had reservations about accepting the job when first approached by Wass. “Even I was going through a transition in my thinking,” Clifford observed. “It [day care] still seemed a bit like glorified babysitting, and did I really want to do that? And it was female-dominated … and all those things.” He went on to point out that such attitudes were “still with us somewhat today but not like it was then.” Eventually he decided to accept the position, but only if he could use his first few months to learn more about day care by reading and visiting different jurisdictions. Wass agreed, and Clifford started as Edmonton’s first day care director on 1 February 1967. He travelled as far afield as the United States to learn more about day care.

In 1966 the commissioners had recommended that the Social Service Department (the renamed Welfare Department) establish an advisory committee to “work closely with the director of day care.” Howard Clifford played an active role in recruiting the members of the advisory committee in the early part of 1967. Its members included Dr. Jean Nelson, a pediatrician who later served as
Alberta’s deputy minister of Community Health. The advisory committee’s first chair was Bruce Ryan, who had met Clifford when they both worked at the psychiatric hospital in Edmonton. “The committee gave Howard more confidence in his position,” commented Ryan. “He could say there was an advisory committee recommending this course of action.”

Howard Clifford quickly became the public face of day care in Edmonton. “It’s hard now to remember just how much pressure we were under all the time by the public that this was a bad thing somehow,” he noted in 1996. “I used to say it as a joke, but there’s a lot of truth to the joke, that when somebody came up to me and said, ‘Mr. Day Care,’ I didn’t know whether to shake hands or duck. You hardly ever found neutral people…. Mainly it was either ‘Right on’ or ‘You son-of-a-gun’ sort of thing.”

One of Howard Clifford’s first acts as director was to adopt the Child Welfare League of America’s recommended day care standards as the City of Edmonton’s minimum standards. They were much higher than the province’s minimum standards for licensing. This had an unintended consequence in the spring of 1967 at the CDN, which had by then been officially designated as a PSS project (and hence made subject to the standards set by the city). The Board of the CDN determined that implementing the city’s new minimum standards had raised the full cost of day care to $3.50 per day from its previous $2.50. It decided to start charging the full fee to unsubsidized parents in July 1967. The new fee was almost double the fee of commercial centres, and, if it had been implemented, it would have driven many of the children from full-fee-paying families out of the CDN. Most of these children came from two-parent families where both parents were working. Ellen Derksen commented at the time, “Except in the most exceptional circumstances, we do not feel that we can take children where both parents are working. We feel that most of these parents can afford to make other arrangements.”

The stand of the CDN Board on this matter angered the parents who were confronted by the 40 percent increase in fees. At that time, expenses like mortgage costs or student loans were not deducted from income when calculating what a family could afford for day care. It is little wonder that one of the CDN parents complained to city council about the fee increase, and militantly commented, “We didn’t fight for the Creche for this to happen.” The matter was mediated by Keith Wass and Howard Clifford, who ensured that the actual fee that was charged was less than the cost of the service. They did so in order to ensure that the PSS day care program would have a universal character rather than serve only as a welfare service.
On the provincial side of the PSS program, L.C. Halmrast remained the responsible minister until his retirement from provincial politics after the general election of 23 May 1967. Until then, the province had accepted all three of Edmonton’s proposed PSS projects in the day care field: the hiring of a municipal day care director, the conversion of the CDN to a PSS project, and a flexible program that allowed for subsidizing care in FDHS for children under three and subsidizing care of children in not-for-profit day cares that were non-sectarian (such as Primrose Place).

One of the central recommendations of the city commissioners in July 1966 had been to establish a pilot day care in a suburban neighbourhood with an accompanying FDH project. In 1967 the city had plans to build recreational centres in three different suburban neighbourhoods. Among the tasks of Howard Clifford and his advisory committee at that time was to determine in which of these recreational centres it would be best to incorporate the day care. On 26 June, city council accepted the recommendation of the Social Service Department that the day care be included in the Glengarry recreation centre in northeast Edmonton. A formal proposal to treat this new day care as a PSS project was then submitted to the province.

At this point, an old-style Social Credit ideologue made a last stand against day care. After the 23 May election, Premier Manning appointed Alf Hooke, “the most rabid of all antisocialist Social Crediters,” as the minister of Public Welfare. Leslie Bella argues that the premier himself had reservations about the PSS program, since he had cautioned L.C. Halmrast in 1966 against going “all out on it.” Manning may therefore have appointed Hooke because there was no one better in his caucus to constrain the growth of the PSS program (1978, 227, 243).

In October 1967, the city received word that the province would not approve the pilot Glengarry day care as a PSS project—and would thus not share in its construction and operating costs. Minister Hooke told the Edmonton Journal that full-scale, government-supported day care programs “are for the birds,” and the paper ran the story with an eye-catching headline. Demonstrating his ignorance of the philosophy of PSS day care, he remarked, “There are a lot better places the government can put its money than into babysitting services.” The minister also indicated that he’d rather pay needy mothers to stay at home with their children than support day care centres, thus demonstrating that his opposition had a strong ideological element. Hooke added that day care for those who choose to work rather than stay at home with their children “can be left to private
enterprise.” He also echoed Ernest Manning’s caution against going “all out on it” when he stated his opposition to a “gigantic wide-open” day care program.52

Howard Clifford thought that if Minister Hooke “had of played it smart, which wasn’t his style,” and used a financial argument in October 1967 to explain why he turned down Glengarry, “we would have been dead because the public didn’t know what it was all about.” Hooke’s candid justification, however, “was of more assistance to us than anything we could have done.”

Minister Hooke’s decision and accompanying comments set off a storm of protest. Edmonton Journal reporter Catherine Carson published a series of articles that supported the movement for quality day care. Letters opposed to Minister Hooke’s position flooded into the premier’s office; the writers included eight women’s organizations, three church groups, three non-profit social service agencies, two community groups, and thirty-four citizens, including six citizens I would classify as prominent (for example, Judge Marjorie Bowker). In contrast, only four submissions supported Mr. Hooke’s stand, two of which came from Edmonton’s Day Nursery Association (commercial operators) and its most outspoken member, Hilde Bloedow.

The letters to Ernest Manning that supported PSS funding for day care included a wide range of arguments. Some of these arguments were very well constructed but would not have received much sympathy from the premier because they contradicted his Social Credit ideology. For example, Catherine Sam wrote to support subsidized day care for children like her own: she had been a working mother over the past several years because her income was necessary while her husband completed medical school. Other arguments, however, would have drawn keen attention from the premier. Of particular note were powerful letters from two women, one separated from an alcoholic husband and the other from an abusive husband, and a very thorough statement by a Social Credit supporter, N. E. Olson, on why providing funds for the Glengarry day care was “consistent with the philosophy and the aims we want to support.”53

Howard Clifford related the following story of how the Glengarry Day Care controversy was eventually resolved. After weeks of public commentary, Premier Manning called a meeting to discuss the matter. Keith Wass attended.

In Keith’s recollection of that meeting ... it wasn’t going really well, it’s almost like a communist plot to break up the family, but he said what turned things around, and it was Keith that turned it around, and it was just a stroke of luck, actually of timing.... Keith made the statement, “Well, one of the things we
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don't want to do, Mr. Premier, is have kids sitting down all day long watching television.” And apparently Manning had just been in some kind of a kerfuffle with the CBC... That turned the conversation around.54

The meeting with Premier Manning resulted in the striking of two new committees. Until then, the minister of Public Welfare had had unchecked authority for approving or denying a PSS application. The two new committees diluted that authority. One comprised civil servants from four different provincial government departments; it was charged with reviewing all PSS proposals and making recommendations on their appropriateness. The second new committee, composed of two representatives from the Department of Public Welfare and two from the City of Edmonton (Wass and Clifford), was to review and make a recommendation on the Glengarry Day Care proposal. It had made a favourable recommendation by early March 1968.55

The official announcement that the Glengarry Day Care had been accepted as a PSS project was not made until May, but by that time approval was a foregone conclusion. The vigorous protest against Minister Hooke’s original decision had convinced most Social Credit leaders, including Premier Manning, of the folly of trying to block municipal day care initiatives. While the movement for quality day care in Edmonton was relatively strong at that time, its efficacy was bolstered by the changing politics of the province. In the 23 May 1967 provincial election, the Social Credit share of the popular vote had fallen to 45 percent compared to 55 percent in 1963, and the Progressive Conservatives had emerged as the major opposition party with 26 percent of the vote and members elected in both Edmonton (three) and Calgary (three). In Edmonton, the Social Credit League had managed to win eight of the eleven constituencies but was badly out-pollled by the combined opposition parties in all constituencies, except for the premier’s own constituency (Chief Electoral Officer 1983, 92–97). Recognizing the seriousness of the Progressive Conservative challenge to its more than thirty years in power, the Social Credit government began to take urban social movements seriously in the late 1960s. Day care was a beneficiary of this renewed party competition in the province. The unusual political dynamics of this situation were demonstrated in the legislature in the fall of 1968, when the Progressive Conservatives put forward a resolution that called for more government assistance to day care centres. The Social Creditors voted in favour of the motion.56
TWO VISIONS FOR DAY CARE IN EDMONTON:
HOWARD CLIFFORD VS. HILDE BLOEDOW

In his first few months as Edmonton’s day care director, Howard Clifford had to determine the role, if any, that commercial centres would have in the city’s plans for subsidized day care. In Edmonton, the number of commercial centres increased from six in the spring of 1964 (with a licensed capacity for 130 children) to eighteen in the fall of 1967 (with a licensed capacity for 483). Among the new centres was Hilde’s Day Nursery, opened in 1965 by Hilde Bloedow. When Howard Clifford began working for the city, Bloedow was the most outspoken member of the Edmonton Day Nursery Association. The association argued that governments should subsidize parents, not centres, and that parents with subsidies should be allowed to “send their children to any licensed Day Care Centre, or home, of their choice.”57

Howard Clifford recalled that many people at the time liked this proposal, and he himself at first thought it “sounded really quite good.” But his support for the proposal waned when he discovered that, contrary to Hilde Bloedow’s contention, the quality of care in many of the commercial day cares in Edmonton was abysmal.

The Edmonton Journal published a piece by Hilde Bloedow in the summer of 1967 that defended the quality of care in commercial day nurseries. In material submitted to the premier a few months later, Bloedow specifically trumpeted the educational qualifications of the staff at her centre: “I myself have had kindergarten training in Germany, my helper has a teacher certificate, and so have many other day nursery operators a good education in business or otherwise.”58 These sorts of claims caused Howard Clifford, sometime during his first few months on the job, to ask Bruce Ryan (the advisory committee chair) to accompany him on a visit to Hilde’s Day Nursery so that they could make first-hand observations of the quality of care. Clifford related his experience:

So we go out there and knock on the door and this old elderly lady, I think about seventy-two, answered the door, and we asked for Hilde, “Oh, she’s out shopping.” “Can we come in and wait for her?” There’s a big hesitation before she allowed us to come in. In the basement there were a number of children sleeping on the floor with cots and these other older kids are all at a table, quiet as mice. And the only staff was this elderly person.
As Sheila Campbell later put it, Hilde Bloedow ran “a terrible day care.... But she was certainly a thorn in everybody's side because she thought she was so good.”

Within a short time of interacting with Edmonton’s commercial operators, Howard Clifford came to reject the idea of subsidizing children to attend their centres. To illustrate how bad things were in these centres, he told the following story, which he had heard from Sheila Campbell. Clifford had asked Campbell and Ellen Derksen to attend the meetings of the Edmonton Day Nursery Association. The meeting in question featured a presentation on first aid. Campbell reported that the discussion soon moved to managing children, since commercial operators “didn’t know how to manage, they had real problems with managing kids.” One operator asked, “So what do you do with a really difficult kid?” Another operator replied, “Well, I know what you do. You hold their head in the toilet and you flush the toilet and you never have any more trouble.” Sheila Campbell remembered that nobody in the room spoke up to challenge the appropriateness of this action. She and Ellen Derksen refused to attend the association’s meetings after this episode.

Hilde Bloedow is an interesting figure in the history of day care in Alberta because, although she ran a commercial day care, she had a very negative impression of many of the parents who put their children into day cares. With this view of her clientele, why did she go into the business? The answer seems to be that operating a day care was not her preferred line of work but was chosen when other lines of work were closed to her because she was a middle-aged woman. Hilde Bloedow accepted the male breadwinner norm and argued that subsidizing day care so that women could earn a second income for a family “is unjust ... toward the High School Graduates who can’t find a job because they are taken by working mothers who want to have a second paycheck coming in.” Furthermore, she argued that two-parent families should not be given a subsidy for day care because it encouraged irresponsible financial behaviour or at least rewarded such behaviour.

In line with her negative view of the decision by mothers in two-parent families to place their children in day care, Bloedow blamed those same mothers for deficiencies in the quality of care. “There are a majority of working mothers who have a husband with a good paying job, a high percentage of them reluctant to pay more that $1.50 per day for one child for day care,” she stated in 1967. “Those mothers have just the physical part of their children in mind, and it is very difficult to reach and convert their materialistic minds.” In another passage, Hilde Bloedow’s criticism of some of these working mothers with a working
husband was even harsher. “Mothers who cannot stand their children are calling for public preventive child welfare,” she averred, “so as to unload their own private responsibility.”

Given that “materialistic” mothers would have constituted a significant proportion of the clientele of Hilde’s Day Nursery, one can only wonder how Bloedow’s views affected her relations with such mothers and their children. As in Julia Wrigley’s (1999) research on nannies in large U.S. cities, this example demonstrates that the values of a child care provider can be dramatically at odds with the values of the parents whose child is in care.

In Howard Clifford’s view, the opponents of PSS day cares, such as Hilde Bloedow, had greater public support at this time than the proponents. “My belief was that if you’d asked the public to take a vote on day care,” he commented in 1996, “we’d have lost every time. But it’s just that fortunately we had a lot of good key citizens who believed in it and kept it going.” The movement for quality day care was also helped by the fact that there were only eighteen commercial day cares in Edmonton in 1967, making the Edmonton Day Nursery Association a relatively weak pressure group, and by Hilde Bloedow’s rhetorical excesses, which probably made some individuals hesitate to support her even when they agreed with her position.

Howard Clifford estimated that he put two-thirds of his working time into education and lobbying efforts. For example, in 1967 there were not yet any college-level courses in early childhood education (ECE) in Alberta, so that autumn, Clifford organized a series of ten weekly educational lectures on day care at the University of Alberta. The next year, he made eighty-four speeches to different groups. Many of his engagements were in Edmonton, but he also accepted invitations to speak throughout Alberta and, in this way, influenced the development of day care in other municipalities. He recalled that he would only turn down a speaking request if a bigger and more influential group wanted him to speak at the same time.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS IN OTHER CITIES

Other Alberta cities soon followed Edmonton in using the new PSS program to fund day cares. In the late 1960s, the baby boom was over and the number of preschoolers in the province was in sharp decline (table 3.1). At the same time, the participation of married women in the paid labour force continued to grow.
very rapidly. In 1961 there had been 77,000 married women in Alberta’s labour force (a 26 percent participation rate) while in 1971 there were 157,000 (a 43 percent participation rate). Furthermore, changes in the law meant that the divorce rate more than doubled between 1966 and 1971, contributing to an increase by 7,000 in the number of lone-parent families (table 3.1). In light of these changes, new demands for public investments in day care were voiced for the first time in small Alberta cities as well as the two large metropolises.

Medicine Hat was the first of the other cities to establish a PSS day care. In 1961 the city’s Council of Social Services had commissioned a survey to determine the need for day care. The survey did not reveal a very strong demand, and no action was taken toward establishing a publicly funded day care. Furthermore, although demand grew during the 1960s, it remained modest compared to Calgary and Edmonton, as evidenced by the fact that no licensed commercial centres were established in Medicine Hat prior to late 1968.

The City of Medicine Hat appointed John Millar as its PSS director in September 1966, and on 25 April 1967, he “detailed a proposal for the establishment of a day care project.” The province approved the proposal in May 1968, the same month that Edmonton’s controversial Glengarry Day Care was formally approved. In September 1969, the Medicine Hat Day Care, formally controlled by a volunteer board of directors, opened in five rooms of a public school. During its first four months of operation, the new day care enrolled 61 different children at one time or another. Significantly, the opening of this PSS project apparently forced the city’s one and only commercial centre to close, and the city would not see another commercial day care for over a decade.64

In 1966 Lethbridge was the largest of Alberta’s small cities with a population of 37,000. It was quick to take advantage of the new PSS program, and by 31 March 1968, Lethbridge had five projects approved by the province compared to three each for Red Deer and Medicine Hat (Bella 1978, 79). One of these projects was a day care study, and in 1969 the city submitted a proposal to the province to establish a PSS day care. Because Lethbridge was larger than Medicine Hat, there had been more demand for day care in the mid-1960s and at least two commercial day cares had opened by 1969. The owners of these centres vigorously objected to the prospect of government-subsidized day cares. Of course, the same objections were voiced by the more numerous commercial operators in Edmonton and Calgary at about the same time. However, unlike the two large cities, Lethbridge did not have municipal civil servants who would champion day care in the face of such opposition. Indeed, the city’s first PSS director, Bill
The 1960s

Kergan, personally favoured commercial day care. Furthermore, religious conservatives were relatively numerous in Lethbridge—8.7 percent of the population of Lethbridge was Mormon in 1971, compared to only 1.9 percent of the entire population of Alberta (Bella and Bozak 1980, 6). Religious conservatives were among those who believed that mothers should stay home to look after their children, thus making day care superfluous. In combination, the opponents were sufficiently strong relative to the proponents that the Social Credit minister of Social Development, Ray Speaker, decided “to withhold the provincial approval until the conflict had been resolved” (Bella and Bozak 1980, 15, 32–33). Speaker was particularly attentive to the conservative opponents of day care since he himself was from southern Alberta and represented the large rural constituency of Little Bow, which started just north of Lethbridge. The numerous conservative voters in the south of the province were the heart of Social Credit support. Indeed, in losing the 1971 provincial election, the Social Credit League still won all eleven constituencies south of Calgary but only fourteen of the remaining sixty-four constituencies (Chief Electoral Officer 1983, 101–6).

Calgary was the other city where the PSS program instigated interesting developments in day care in the 1960s. Just prior to the PSS era, the first not-for-profit day care opened in Calgary, supported by the Catholic Church and the UCF. The Providence Day Care Centre was established in March 1966 as a new program in a complex of social services that had been operated by the Sisters of Charity of Providence since 1958. The Providence Day Care was committed to quality care of young children, which is why Karen Harding stated it “could be an example for all future Alberta day nurseries.” The Sister Superior of the Order emphasized that “day care, to be effective, must have a training and educational basis—not just provide babysitting services.” The Providence Day Care was reorganized on a non-sectarian basis in December 1967 and thereafter became the first PSS day care in Calgary, licensed for seventy children.65

Prior to this development, however, the province had approved PSS funding for a study of day care in Calgary. In the years prior to 1966, Calgary’s Social Planning Council had been asked to study the need for day care “on numerous occasions.” The group decided to initiate such a study in the wake of the new funding opportunities in the PSS Act (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 5). The research was directed by Barbara Scott, who had previously worked for the EWC as the staff support person for its Day Care Planning Committee.66 Once the research was underway, the city successfully applied to the province to fund it as a PSS project. Completed in June 1967, the study found “that there were about 9,000 preschool aged children
in Calgary whose mothers work, while there were only licensed day nursery spaces available for approximately 732 preschool aged children.”

Based upon this research, in September 1967, the Day Care Committee of the Social Planning Council issued a set of recommendations. Most importantly, it advised the city to establish “a model day care service at standards approximating those of the Child Welfare League of America ... in a neighbourhood in need of, and demanding, day care services.”

The city itself was relatively slow in responding to the recommendations. It decided its first move would be to hire a day care counsellor, and in July 1968 it applied to the province for PSS funding for the position. Al Hagan did not take up his duties as the first counsellor until the following April, but, in the meantime, two very different sorts of community initiatives on day care sprung up.

The first was a grassroots initiative in the working-class communities of Bowness and Montgomery in northwest Calgary. It began in early 1968 when Barb Scott convinced Phil Lalonde, a community organizer with the Company of Young Canadians, to start “organizing the community around the issue of day care.” When he accepted the challenge, she gave him the addresses of the fifty local residents who had been identified as interested in day care in the Social Planning Council survey of 1967.

The Company of Young Canadians had been created by the federal government in 1966. Its members were committed to organizing communities to pursue social change (Hamilton 1970). Bowness was one of the poorest areas of Calgary, and Lalonde was assigned to work there starting in the summer of 1967. During his first six months in Bowness, “he became pretty well known in the community” and helped to mobilize a group of immigrant parents to demand a kindergarten so that their children could better learn English before starting grade one. The demand was rejected by local school authorities, so Lalonde was looking for a new project when Scott convinced him to organize around day care. In keeping with the philosophy of the Company of Young Canadians, over the next year, Phil Lalonde talked “about day care as a community development project” (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 8–9).

Phil Lalonde first gathered interested residents together at informal coffee parties. He also organized public meetings held on 13 and 28 March 1968, doing the “fancy leg work” such as ensuring that a number of invitations were delivered and posters were placed in schools and stores. The attendees at the 28 March meeting decided to develop a proposal for a day care using widespread community input: a number of subcommittees were struck, each charged with
researching and writing a section of the proposal. Since this approach required the participation of more than the twenty residents in attendance, Lalonde, with the assistance of other members of the Company of Young Canadians, agreed to contact other interested residents and ask them to serve on the subcommittees. As the work proceeded in the spring of 1968, Phil Lalonde could be counted on to serve as a resource person for each subcommittee. For instance, he helped the admissions committee to get community feedback on its tentative ideas (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 10–14). Later he assisted the whole group when it started holding regular meetings in May to discuss the work of the subcommittees. Evidently, a great deal of work was accomplished in a short time since a formal proposal “for a community day care centre in Bowness-Montgomery” was submitted to the city’s Social Services Committee in June. The following month, an interim board of directors of the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Association (B-MDCA) was appointed. Furthermore, in September 1968, a door-to-door canvas was organized to confirm community support for the day care and increase the membership of the B-MDCA.69

The association assumed responsibility for all aspects of the proposed day care, including finding a suitable location. After a couple of possibilities fell through, it secured the right to use the closed Bowness Public School, with the public school board agreeing to a rent of $1 per year (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 16).

The second community initiative in 1968 involved the sorts of charitable women’s organizations that had shown concern about day care for young children in Calgary as far back as World War II. On 24 May 1968, six such organizations held an inaugural meeting to begin organizing a proposal for a model day care. The organizations included the University Women’s Club, the Local Council of Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Junior League. They submitted a proposal for a Model Day Care (MDC) to the city in July; it was rejected “because their demands were too high” (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 19), they lacked community support, and they did not have a building for a day care.

For the remainder of 1968, the Board of the Model Day Care resisted considering a merger with the B-MDCA even though this course of action had been suggested by Barb Scott of the Social Planning Council (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 18–19). After discussions regarding the establishment of a Model Day Care at Mount Royal College proved fruitless in late 1968, the president of the B-MDCA, Catherine Martini (who was also an elected public school trustee), suggested to her counterpart with the Model Day Care, Jean Neve, that they work
together. Within two months, the groups had amalgamated, with the official name remaining the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Association. The merger brought significant benefits to the B-MDCA. The Junior League donated $15,000 and promised to provide volunteers to improve the quality of care in the centre. The National Council of Jewish Women donated $6,000. Furthermore, the involvement of these prominent women’s organizations increased the credibility of the proposal and meant that there was a strong push to make the project a model for quality child care.

The formal PSS submission for the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Program was made in August 1969, and the province gave its approval in October. The program would be opened the following year. This was a trail-blazing initiative, not only because it linked day care to community development but also because it integrated a day care with a satellite FDH program and thus offered the potential for continuous care of children between the ages of a few months to twelve years. The PSS proposal called for the hiring of an assistant director, who would select FDHS, make placements in the homes, and provide follow-up supervision. The original idea was that the day care would accept preschool children aged three and older while younger children and school-aged children would be looked after in satellite FDHS. More than forty years later, this type of integrated program is favoured by early childhood experts even though it is all too rarely found in reality. This shows the extraordinary vision that guided the Bowness-Montgomery program.

The Bowness-Montgomery project was the first in a series of new initiatives in Calgary in 1969. This yielded a number of new PSS day cares in the early 1970s, which will be detailed in the next chapter. At the same time, commercial day care was flourishing in the city, even more so than in Edmonton. In November 1966, there had been twenty-five licensed commercial facilities in Calgary with a capacity for 663 children. Less than three years later, in July 1969, there were thirty-seven commercial facilities with a capacity for 1,166 children. Furthermore, in 1967 commercial operators had founded the Day Care Association of Calgary (DCAC) to represent their interests.

Commercial operators reacted with alarm to the initial organizing efforts in Bowness and Montgomery in 1968. At the first public meeting, organized by Phil Lalonde and community supporters and held on 13 March, “about twenty private daycare operators from across the city” attended and “took over almost immediately” with their self-serving arguments against PSS day cares. One participant commented that the commercial operators “were very determined not to
let a local citizens group in favour of public day care to even exist.” An owner of a
centre in the area, described as “most hostile towards community development
of day care,” even volunteered to serve on a committee. Despite the owners’ dis-
ruptive tactics, however, residents meeting in small discussion groups expressed
a desire “for additional daycare resources to serve the needs of their community”
(Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 10–11). At the time, there were two commercial
day cares in Bowness-Montgomery, with a total capacity for at most fifty children,
and the fees were well beyond the means of many residents.75

Over the next two weeks, the steering committee made plans to neutralize the
influence of commercial operators on the process, and the operators responded
by taking on an observational rather than a disruptive role at the second public
meeting on 31 March 1968. This time only two commercial owners were in
attendance, one being the secretary of the DCAC (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970,
12–13). Over the next sixteen months leading up to the submission of the PSS
proposal, commercial owners never again tried to disrupt the activities of the
B-MDCA. Nevertheless, they were recognized as a significant interest group, and
a short section of the proposal to the provincial government, titled “Opposition,”
argued against the notion that the proposed community day care would take
business away from commercial centres.

The 1968 intervention of commercial owners in the organizing campaign for
a PSS day care in Bowness foreshadowed how they would respond to the expan-
sion of the PSS system in Calgary in the 1970s. Although there were only thirty-
seven commercial centres in Calgary in 1969, this was a relatively large number
since the entire province had merely seventy-eight licensed facilities (table A.1).
Furthermore, as will be detailed in the next chapter, with minimal government
regulations and a strong demand, commercial day care in the late 1960s and
throughout the 1970s was very profitable. This meant that the owners, especially
those who operated on a capitalistic basis with a large capacity, had a great deal
to lose if preventive social service day cares became a template for a more exten-
sive system of publicly funded, not-for-profit day cares.

PARALLELS BETWEEN DAY CARE POLITICS IN 1942–44 AND THE 1960s

For the most part, day care disappeared from the public agenda in Alberta between
1945 and the 1960s. Nevertheless, there are a great many similarities between the
day care politics during World War II and the latter part of the 1960s:
ADVOCACY
Important role was played by middle-class women’s organizations. Prominent professionals were among the advocates. Sophisticated studies of the need for day care were conducted by volunteers.

ADVOCATES’ ARGUMENTS
Social needs, not normative principles, should guide policy. Scientific research on children justifies demands.

QUALITY-OF-CARE DEBATES
Widely differing views were expressed on minimum and optimum standards of care. Advocates had a critical view of the quality of care at the Edmonton Creche and in commercial centres.

ACCESSIBILITY DEBATE
Should publicly subsidized day care be a narrowly targeted welfare service or a widely available service?

GENDER DEBATE
Should public policy support married women with young children who wish to work outside the home?

INTER-GOVERNMENTAL DYNAMICS
A municipal-federal coalition took shape to pursue day care against the governmental opposition of the province. The province insisted that municipalities share some of the costs of day cares. The initial proposal in 1943 was 50 percent federal, 25 percent provincial, and 25 percent municipal. Actual cost sharing in the 1960s was 50-30-20.

PROVINCIAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS
Manning government was under political pressure from the Left (CCF victory in Saskatchewan in 1944; medicare’s introduction in 1966). Socially progressive legislation was introduced in Alberta (Maternity Hospitalization in 1944; Preventive Social Services in 1966). Manning government was hostile to the federal government but pragmatically participated in programs that offered financial gain for Alberta. It modified federal programs to better reflect its own orientation.

COMMON PERSONALITIES AND GROUPS
Premier Manning and fellow executive committee member Alf Hooke
Enid McCalla of the Edmonton Day Care Committee
Edmonton Creche
Women’s groups such as the University Women’s Club of Calgary

PARALLEL EVENTS
Province approved, then withdrew approval for, a program, followed by a storm of protest (wartime day nurseries in 1943-44; Edmonton Glengarry Centre in 1967).
One of the primary reasons for these similarities is the continuity in Alberta’s political elites. Indeed, Premier Ernest Manning dealt with a major controversy over provincial funding for day cares both at the beginning (1943–44) and at the end (1967–68) of his quarter of a century in office. In the first of these controversies (wartime day nurseries), the province refused funding while in the second (Edmonton’s Glengarry Day Care), it granted funding. Nevertheless, despite the different funding decisions, the historical record suggests that the inner circle of the Social Credit government in 1965–67 had much the same reservations about funding day care as did their colleagues in the mid-1940s. The Social Credit political elite of the 1960s was stuck in the traditional conservatism that best characterizes the 1940s and 1950s, and was more rural than urban in sensibility. These are the major reasons for Social Credit’s loss of the next provincial election and rapid disintegration as a serious political force.

The similarities listed above also exist because the struggle for quality child care that was fought and lost in the 1940s had to be re-fought in the 1960s. Since the advocacy for publicly funded day care in the 1940s was relatively strong, both in terms of argumentation and organization, it is not surprising that the advocates in the 1960s used some of the same arguments and engaged in similar campaigns. In fact, some of the important advocacy organizations, such as the University Women’s Club of Calgary, were identical in the two periods.

Two other major factors help to account for the similarities. First, the government of Alberta was prodded into at least considering action on day care in each of the periods because of federal initiatives. At the same time, while the presence of a federal initiative accounts for some of the across-period similarities in day care politics, the different character of the initiatives goes a long way toward explaining the different outcomes in the two periods. During World War II, the federal initiative was limited by its single-minded focus on the progress of the war. In contrast, the federal initiative in the mid-1960s, in the form of the CAP, was very much part of a broader social welfare agenda that included the Canada Pension Plan and medicare.

Second, although the period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s saw considerable social change, particularly in the organization of the economy and the character of class relations, the patriarchal gender order remained relatively stable. Consequently, the normative belief that young children are best looked after during the day by their mothers at home was widely held in the mid-1960s, just as it had been two decades earlier. As the 1960s ended, this belief was increasingly viewed as irrelevant given the large number of young children...
who required care while their mothers engaged in paid labour. And, just as significantly, a new wave of feminists began questioning the desirability of mothers being primarily responsible for the care of young children. In this framework, day care became a component of the struggle for women’s equality, just as it had become a component of the struggle for class equality in PSS initiatives like the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Association.