The participation of married women in the labour force continued to increase in Alberta in the 1970s, creating yet more demand for day care. By 1976 fully 48 percent of married women were in the paid labour force. Furthermore, there were 41,000 lone-parent families in Alberta in 1976, up by 21 percent from 1971 (Alberta Bureau of Statistics 1981). The demand for day care was felt most strongly in Edmonton and Calgary where, by 1976, 51 percent of Albertans lived. However, day care also became an important public issue in small cities and many towns during the 1970s, often because the market was too small or dispersed to entice commercial investment. Hence, of the sixty Preventive Social Service (PSS) day cares established between 1967 and 1977, 22 percent were located in Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, or Lethbridge (line 7, table 4.1), and 30 percent were scattered across the province in communities such as High Level, Slave Lake, and Claresholm.

Until 1980–81, no provincial formula existed for how much of the PSS budget should be spent in each community. John Lackey, the second PSS director, noted that this ad hoc funding system encouraged “the most progressive communities [to come] in with well thought out projects [and] they tended to get the programming.” Therefore, the structure of Alberta’s PSS program in the late 1960s and 1970s promoted important municipal variations in the extent and character of day care services. The first part of this chapter discusses the developments at the provincial level that at first resulted in the rapid expansion of the number of PSS day cares but eventually led to the removal of day care from the PSS system and the end to special funding for the existing PSS day cares. The second part profiles the development of PSS day care in each of the six largest cities as well as some smaller municipalities. My goals with these profiles are to highlight the
most important municipal initiatives and struggles, detail municipal responses to the provincial abandonment of the PSS day care system, and account for the differences among municipalities in both programming and political action.

Table 4.1: Involvement of Six Alberta Municipalities in Day Care, 1966 to 1980s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Edmonton</th>
<th>Calgary</th>
<th>Medicine Hat</th>
<th>Red Deer</th>
<th>Grande Prairie</th>
<th>Lethbridge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First day care director hired</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (1976)</td>
<td>461,000</td>
<td>470,000</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>47,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population of newborns to 4 year olds (1976)</td>
<td>33,400</td>
<td>36,600</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of lone-parent families (1976)</td>
<td>13,400</td>
<td>12,200</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS spending per capita (1975–76 fiscal year)</td>
<td>$5.98</td>
<td>$4.96</td>
<td>$12.83</td>
<td>$4.42</td>
<td>$9.62</td>
<td>$4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of PSS day care centres (May 1977)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of municipally run centres</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality opposed to the province’s takeover of day care in 1978</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date the municipality joined the provincial system</td>
<td>Jan 1980</td>
<td>Oct 1978</td>
<td>Apr 1979</td>
<td>Apr 1979</td>
<td>Apr 1979</td>
<td>Dec 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing responsibility, 1978–80</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support provided for preschool child care (start of the 1980s)</td>
<td>Subsidized quality care in thirteen approved not-for-profit centres</td>
<td>Subsidized quality care in three municipal centres</td>
<td>Subsidized quality care in five municipal centres; ran a satellite FDH project</td>
<td>Subsidized quality care in two not-for-profit centres</td>
<td>Ran a satellite FDH project; provided small grants to two day care societies</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Two rural centres were partially run by Grande Prairie and District Preventive Social Services.
SUPPORT AND THEN ABANDONMENT: 
THE LOUGHEED GOVERNMENT AND PSS DAY CARES

Two developments in 1971 significantly changed the provincial landscape for municipal action on day care. The first was the formation of a province-wide lobby and education group committed to quality child care, the Alberta Association for Young Children (AAYC). The second was the election of a new provincial government, headed by Peter Lougheed from Calgary, that was more attuned to the social needs of urban residents. This part of the chapter analyzes the significance of these developments and then traces how the new government initially paid close attention to the AAYC’s lobbying efforts for quality initiatives in the care of children but lost interest as the decade progressed. The process of abandonment culminated in the provincial government’s unilateral 1978 decision to end the PSS model for funding high-quality day cares in favour of modest, income-tested subsidies that followed subsidized children to any licensed day care (commercial or not-for-profit) in which they were enrolled.

In late May of 1970, the Department of Social Development sponsored a “Day Care Seminar” in Olds, Alberta. The speakers at the seminar were a “Who’s Who” of day care in Alberta at that time. They included three representatives of the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Association (BMDC) in Calgary, including executive director Nancy Hall; Mary Hull of the Community Day Nursery (CDN) and Ellen Derksen of Primrose Place Day Care in Edmonton; Rita Wright of the Day Care Association of Calgary (DCAC); pediatrician Dr. Jean Nelson, who was then working as a provincial civil servant; Sheila Campbell, the only participant asked to make two presentations to the seminar; and both Al Hagan and Howard Clifford.

Howard Clifford delivered the keynote address on the opening evening of the seminar. Many of the points made in his speech were later featured in his 1972 book, Let’s Talk Day Care. In light of recent research that demonstrates the importance of quality child care for the brain development of young children (McCain and Mustard 1999; Heckman 2006), it is noteworthy that in 1970 Howard Clifford was already highlighting this issue: he summarized the work of researchers who “found that even rats who have been given a stimulating environment have an enlarged cortex over and beyond that of the rats who have not been so stimulated.”

Dr. Nelson’s speech connected the imperative for quality day care to the World Health Organization charter. Five years later, she was appointed the deputy
minister of Health Services in the Department of Social Services and Community Health (SSCH), becoming the first woman deputy minister in Alberta’s history. This appointment meant that in the middle part of the 1970s, the Alberta government was being advised by a senior bureaucrat who had a superb knowledge of day care issues and an unquestioned commitment to quality day care.4

Participants left the Olds seminar thinking it would be a springboard for the establishment of a “province wide association of all groups and individuals catering to infants and young children.” A committee led by Sheila Campbell organized the founding conference of the AAYC held in Edmonton in October 1971 and financially supported by the Clifford E. Lee Foundation (Campbell 1997, 7).

The AAYC’s founding occurred just six weeks after the province’s first change in government in thirty-six years. Between 1967 and 1971, the province’s official opposition party, the Progressive Conservatives (PCs), had made improvements to day care an important public issue. Prior to the 1971 election, the leader of the Progressive Conservatives, Peter Lougheed, told Calgary’s day care counsellor, Al Hagan, that his party “was going to push day care and that was part of their platform.” Hagan also recalled that “prospective candidates for the Conservative Party ... wanted a lot of information about day care, and wanted to make that a major platform item.”5 Given this context, the Conservative victory on 30 August 1971 meant that the institutionalized political system was now open to much more innovation and change in the field of child care than it had been under the Social Credit government.

The AAYC conference managed to attract not one but two members of the new provincial cabinet as keynote speakers: Minister of Social Development Neil Crawford and Minister of Education Lou Hyndman, both of whom represented Edmonton constituencies (Campbell 1997, 7). Apparently, at the time of its founding, the AAYC was treated as a very important interest group by the new government.

There are different ways to categorize the nature of the relationships between interest groups and states. According to one such schema, interest groups that work with state institutions fall into three types: a core insider group is consulted on a broad range of issues in a particular policy area and has appreciable influence on state policies; a specialist insider group is consulted and influences policy on a narrow set of issues; and a peripheral insider group “has the insider form” (i.e., has access to state officials and is actively consulted) “but little, if any, influence” (Maloney, Jordan, and McLaughlin 1994, 27, 31). The AAYC
undoubtedly began its existence with real influence on the provincial government, since the Progressive Conservatives had committed themselves to acting on day care. Furthermore, because the AAYC defined its mandate quite broadly (rather than restricting its attention to day care), it is better classified in the early 1970s as a core insider than as a specialist insider group.6

The primary public activity of the AAYC was its annual conferences that featured high-profile authors and researchers as keynote speakers. In the early 1970s, the conferences were intended to feed directly into provincial government policy. For instance, government ministers requested that the AAYC submit policy recommendations coming out of its 1972 conference, “The Child and His Family in the Context of Today”; these recommendations were voted on by conference participants and presented to the government in December of that year along with vote results.7

The core insider status of the AAYC is indicated by a number of its activities in 1973: a meeting with members of the legislature to explain its recommendations, the presentation of a brief to a legislative committee on regulations, the appointment of an AAYC representative to the province’s Early Childhood Co-ordinating Council, the active involvement of provincial social service bureaucrats on AAYC committees, and the very public actions taken by the AAYC Board in opposition to a government initiative.8 This protest fits the mode of action of a “high-profile” insider group that feels confident enough about its place in the policy-making process that it sometimes tries to mobilize the public to pressure government (Maloney, Jordan, and McLaughlin 1994, 28).

That same year, the AAYC presented to the provincial government a very detailed set of recommendations for standards in day cares and family day homes (FDHS). These recommendations were adapted from a document produced by the Day Care Centres Committee of the Canadian Pediatric Society. Nine pediatricians had served on that committee, including two members of the AAYC, Dr. Gerry Holman (the chair of the pediatricians’ committee) and Dr. Jean Nelson. At this point, the AAYC was taking its core insider status so seriously that it was close to drafting legislation for the government.9 In 1974 the organization actually produced an outline for a new “Child Day Care Act.” It included regulatory language that could have been directly incorporated into a government bill. More importantly, however, the outline presented an idealistic vision of day care as a “total service.” No statement better captures the tremendous optimism and communitarian philosophy of the advocates in the 1970s:
It is essential that the identity of day care services as specialized health and welfare services be recognized. Only under such circumstances will the services receive adequate attention and become available to all children and families. Day care is more than a social development service, it is more than a preventive welfare service, it is more than a health service, it is more than an educational service, it is more than a remedial service, it is more than an early childhood service, it is more than a family service; it is a total service providing for the needs of children, and the needs of parents, contributing to the prevention of family problems, and problem families, contributing to the growth and development of children, of parents, of families and of society.10

However, the Lougheed government was unwilling to adopt the AAYC’s policy recommendations as its own. At the same time, with a provincial election on the horizon, the government had to be seen taking some action. Therefore, in the spring of 1974, a consultation process was launched, headed by Mel Finlay, who then held the position of program planner in the Department of Health and Social Development (HSD). The AAYC was invited to nominate a representative to help plan “a province-wide workshop to be held at Government House, Edmonton, sometime in September.” Significantly, the DCAC received a similar invitation, indicating the Lougheed government had started to treat the AAYC and the DCAC as parallel interest groups. At this point, the AAYC’s influence on the provincial government had definitely waned compared to 1971–72. Nevertheless, it is probably safe to say that the provincial government and civil servants still viewed the AAYC as a core insider group because of its expert knowledge in many policy areas, as well as its province-wide representation base. In contrast, the rising influence of Calgary’s commercial operators was grounded in the increasing prominence of large and very profitable centres in the sector, as well as the sympathy for free enterprise rhetoric of many members of the Conservative caucus.11

The September 1974 workshop at Government House involved “representative parents, board members and staff from both publicly subsidized and privately operated day care centres across the province.” The participants discussed documents prepared by the AAYC, DCAC, Canadian Council on Social Development, and Calgary Social Services (CSS), and came up with their own series of recommendations. In turn, Mel Finlay circulated these recommendations in November 1974 and welcomed further comments. In doing so, he indicated that the cost of raising standards was a concern and that no immediate action was forthcoming.12
Shortly thereafter, Premier Lougheed called a provincial election, which the governing Progressive Conservatives won handily. In comparison to the August 1971 election, in March 1975 the Conservative vote increased by 16 percent and the Social Credit vote decreased by 23 percent. As a consequence, in 1975 the Progressive Conservatives won most rural constituencies in addition to sweeping every constituency in Alberta’s six largest municipalities (Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta 1983, 17, 109–14). The 1975 Conservative caucus of sixty-nine members had many more traditional conservative voices than the caucus of forty members that had been elected in 1971. This was far from a propitious turn of events for those who were advocating for quality day care. Indeed, the Tory sweep in the 1975 election meant that the governing party no longer needed to pay such close attention to urban social movements, since its base of power had extended well beyond urban Alberta. One sign of the changing composition and orientation of the governing party was the post-election appointment of Rocky Mountain House MLA Helen Hunley as the Minister of SSHC in place of Edmonton MLA Neil Crawford. In addition to being a highly successful municipal politician in Rocky Mountain House prior to her election to the legislature in 1971, Hunley was a member of the local business elite: she owned an insurance agency and in the 1960s had been the first woman in North America to own an International Harvester dealership.13

Following the 1975 provincial election, the Progressive Conservative Party did not turn to the AAYC for policy ideas on day care the way it had following the 1971 election. Indeed, the 1975 election constituted the beginning of a six-year period during which the AAYC rapidly moved from a core insider group to a specialist insider group to a peripheral insider group. During these years, the AAYC remained true to its convictions, while Premier Lougheed and his government abandoned their previous commitment to building a quality system of day care for Alberta’s children.

The formal process of revising Alberta’s licensing standards and funding for day care began when a “Proposal for Day Care Standards and Licensing,” written by provincial civil servants, was released and widely circulated in July 1976. The proposal read like draft legislation; it combined existing Board of Health and Welfare Homes standards, advanced changes to some of the existing standards, and added some new standards. An example of a recommended change concerned staff-to-child ratios: a minimum ratio of one to twelve for children aged thirty months to six years was offered in place of the minimum ratio of one to twenty for children aged two to seven years. An example of an entirely new
standard concerned staff training. The proposal recommended establishing a “Professional Day Care Workers Registry” where completion of a post-secondary course or a mix of training and work experience qualified a person for registration. A further recommendation was that upon adoption of the new standards, all day cares had to immediately employ at least one registered professional, and within seven years all staff members responsible for leading groups of children had to be duly registered (Alberta SSCH 1976, 14–16).

“Hundreds of letters, briefs and reports” were submitted in response to the proposal (ADCTF 1977, 1), including a twenty-four-page submission by the AAYC. Prior to the beginning of the entire process, however, Sheila Campbell had concluded that the AAYC had lost its status as a core insider group. In March 1976, she noted that the AAYC did not have access to the minister and senior departmental bureaucrats, and was not routinely consulted concerning social policy on young children; furthermore, department civil servants “are not making our position as clear to the minister as we would wish.”

By the end of 1976, day care was once again a highly politicized and polarized provincial issue, thanks in no small part to the government’s own public consultation process. In an attempt to find a workable compromise between advocates for high-quality care and commercial operators who supported minimal standards, in January 1977 Minister Hunley appointed the Alberta Day Care Task Force (ADCTF) to quickly study and make recommendations on standards and subsidies. The composition of the task force demonstrated that the AAYC was still an important interest group in the eyes of the provincial government. Three of the seven members of the ADCTF, including chair Myer Horowitz, were prominent members of the AAYC. Therefore, even though the AAYC had lost its core insider status by 1977, it still had a prominent role as a specialist insider group.

The input of the AAYC leaders on the task force was countered by a leading member of the DCAC, Caroline Kiehlbauch (owner of Fairyland Day Care in Calgary, licensed for 119 children), a second commercial operator from Edmonton, and two “private citizens.” The advocates for quality day care on the ADCTF took the approach of compromising with the others in order to come up with a set of recommendations that could be endorsed by all members. For instance, the task force recommended a minimum staff-to-child ratio for three and four year olds of one to twelve, whereas the AAYC’s recommended minimum was one to eight. Furthermore, while the ADCTF called for half of all day care staff to be licensed within five years, it did not stipulate the minimum training...
requirement for licensing; in contrast, the AAYC unambiguously recommended that the minimum training requirement for a day care worker be “graduation from a two year training program in the field of child and family studies.”

Myer Horowitz, then the academic vice-president of the University of Alberta, did a masterful job of leading the task force and meeting the government’s objective of fashioning a compromise. The final report, released on 30 April 1977, used language that would appeal to commercial operators and conservatives who harboured suspicions about more government involvement in day care (e.g., “Day care is not a substitute for the family unit” and “We do not think it is desirable to try to legislate detailed program requirements”). It also candidly discussed how its recommendations were far from ideal, thus appealing to advocates and the PSS community who would be unhappy with the compromises (e.g., “We want to emphasize that we are proposing a minimum standard for the immediate future and not the ideal for the next five years and clearly not the ideal for 1985 or for the year 2000”). All members of the task force endorsed the report (ADCTF 1977, 4, 8, 14).

The most important section of the report concerned “financial considerations.” The task force recommended tripling government expenditures on day care so that every child who qualified for a subsidy received one: “Financial assistance for child care should be made available to families on an individual basis through the purchase of service within approved units, i.e., those which meet the specific standards of the province” (1977, 17). This sentence is ambiguous but seems to recommend that any provincially licensed facility should be paid a government subsidy for an eligible child. This is certainly how the provincial government subsequently acted.

The report recommended that the province and a municipality determine the maximum monthly subsidy they would pay to a day care centre. “In the event that the costs of a centre were above [the maximum subsidy] ... then it would be the responsibility of the unit to set fees above the municipal maximum or to acquire the extra funds from some other source” (1977, 19). Unfortunately, the members of the AAYC on the task force failed to consider the implications of this recommendation for the high-quality PSS centres. It was precisely these centres that had costs higher than the maximum subsidy because their current standards were well above the new licensing standards proposed by the ADCTF. Among those who picked up on this problem was the manager of neighbourhood services for the City of Calgary, Frank Hoebarth. On 8 August 1977, he wrote in a memo to Sam Blakely, “I am concerned about the effect the proposed purchase
of service formula will have on subsidized centres.” Hoebarth’s fear was that, under the proposed system, “community based non-profit centres, such as Dover and Shaganappi, are likely to be priced out of the market.”

The ADCTF had foreseen variability in the maximum allowable day care subsidy across the province. At a 10 August 1977, meeting, however, it was revealed that the province intended to impose “a uniform fee scale.” The issue of the cost of higher standards in PSS centres was directly broached. The provincial civil servants indicated that the provincial government had not yet dealt with the issue but suggested that, at the very least, the PSS centres be given five years of grace before they would have to switch to the lower funding levels of the new provincial system. The following month, cabinet’s Social Planning Committee accepted the Department of ssCH’s recommendations that all deficit operating funding for PSS centres be phased out over five years and no new PSS centres be approved.

The Social Planning Committee also recommended “that the province set realistic minimum standards for day care operators”; this language indicates that quality of care was not of paramount importance and would be susceptible to downward lobbying pressure. Indeed, the documents discussed by the Social Planning Committee (followed within a week by discussions in Executive Council and cabinet) indicate that the cost of the new subsidy system was the overriding issue in government decision making.16

The Alberta cabinet gave final approval to the new provincial day care system on 13 December 1977; it was announced in March of the next year.17 The new system proved very popular with commercial operators and the thousands of Albertans for whom day care subsidies became accessible for the first time. For the movement for quality day care, however, the new system was a disaster: not only did it fail to significantly raise the minimum licensing standards for day cares, but it signalled that provincial support for the innovative PSS day cares and FDH programs would be phased out. Significantly, the new standards were even weaker than the “compromises” recommended by the ADCTF. For instance, the staff-to-child ratio for babies in a day care centre was specified as one to six (Alberta 1978, 317), whereas the ADCTF had recommended a ratio of one to five (1977, 46), and FDHs were allowed to care for up to four children under two years of age in addition to any of the operator’s own young children (Alberta 1978, 312), whereas the ADCTF had recommended that FDHs be allowed to care for a maximum of three children under two years of age, including any of the operator’s young children (1977, 46).
The AAYC was highly critical of the province’s new plans for day care. Indeed, the tone of its May 1978 submission to the provincial government was anything but conciliatory. The association believed the new provincial standards for day cares were “so nebulous and deficient that it is highly unlikely that any improvement in the quality of care for children in commercial day care centres will result.” Furthermore, the organization feared for the future of PSS day cares.18

The members of the AAYC had thrown themselves into the job of reforming the entire day care system in the early 1970s and had willingly accepted the core insider role in policy discussions and development. An alternative would have been to concentrate exclusively on the development of exemplary or “lighthouse” PSS centres, thus eschewing the politicization of the quality of care in commercial centres. Among those who have argued in favour of this strategy is Howard Clifford.19 The main advantage would have been a stronger PSS sector with advocates giving it more attention. In particular, advocates could have assisted in strengthening the links between communities and the centres in which they were located, perhaps by linking day care centres to a broader community development model of human services. Quebec provides an example of this type of communitarian model (Jenson 2001). In addition, given more time, advocates could have provided technical expertise to municipalities that were slow to join the PSS program, thus ensuring wider availability of PSS centres throughout the province. Nevertheless, Sheila Campbell and other AAYC leaders felt a strong moral duty to try to reform the entire day care system when given the opportunity by the Progressive Conservative government, knowing as they did the abysmal quality of care in some commercial centres. To their dismay, the Lougheed Conservatives not only did not strengthen day care regulations as thoroughly or quickly as they had hoped, but withdrew supplementary financial support from the network of high-quality day cares that had been created under the PSS system.

Changing the direction of day care in Alberta in 1978 was a challenging political process for the Lougheed government. The provincial system that had developed under the umbrella of the PSS Act was a series of partnerships between municipalities and the province, with municipalities holding the lead role in each partnership. Municipal governments therefore had to be won over to the province’s new policy direction, or otherwise mollified or neutralized. Furthermore, the PSS system of day cares, which by 1978 involved hundreds of workers and thousands of families, had grown into a formidable interest group. The following section profiles the development of PSS day care programs around Alberta in the 1970s. It also traces how different municipal governments responded to
the province’s invitation to become a partner in the new system that featured portable subsidies for low-income families and a level of licensing standards that was merely custodial.

MUNICIPAL INITIATIVES IN DAY CARE

Edmonton

At the end of the 1960s, the City of Edmonton’s PSS day care services far surpassed those of other Alberta municipalities. While Calgary and Medicine Hat each had only a single centre—and the first PSS centres would not be established in Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and Lethbridge until the 1970s—Edmonton had four PSS centres (line 2, table 4.1). Furthermore, Edmonton had initiated a PSS family day home program in 1968 and had started funding two out-of-school care (OOSC) programs in 1969.

New PSS centres were opened in Edmonton in each of 1970 and 1971. The six PSS centres in operation at the end of 1971 cared for slightly over three hundred preschoolers, with three of the centres also licensed to care for additional school-aged children. In addition, about eighty children received subsidized care in approved FDHS (Clifford n.d., 169).20

The mayor of Edmonton from 1968 to 1974 was Ivor Dent, a prominent member of the New Democratic Party (NDP). The steady growth of Edmonton’s PSS system of day care in the early 1970s was facilitated by a sympathetic council led by Mayor Dent. As a consequence, the opponents of PSS day care in Edmonton were never able to utilize municipal political forums to air their arguments. This contrasts with what happened in Calgary, where in both 1971 and 1974–75, major public debates took place about the PSS approach to day care (see the next section).

Nevertheless, the commercial sector grew significantly in Edmonton at the same time as the PSS system was expanding. Between 1967 and 1971, the number of commercial centres doubled from eighteen to thirty-five. The city’s fifth PSS centre, West End Day Care, opened in October 1970 just a few blocks away from Hilde’s Day Nursery. A few months later, Hilde Bloedow protested to Mayor Dent and city council that she had lost two children to the PSS centre.21

The opposition from Edmonton’s commercial operators to the PSS system of day care could be put down to narrow self-interest. However, as noted in chapter
Howard Clifford recognized that the majority of Albertans had considerable doubts about the wisdom of expanding the availability of publicly subsidized, high-quality (“Cadillac”) day care. Therefore, into the 1970s, a major focus of his job as Edmonton’s day care director was to counter those doubts through education. Of particular note in this regard is his small book *Let’s Talk Day Care* (undated but apparently published in 1972). It was “directed to administrators, politicians and concerned citizens who are in a position to make or influence decisions which affect the implementation of day care programs” (8). Clifford believed that his educational efforts could at least give decision makers the information and arguments they needed to move ahead in the face of opposition.

*Let’s Talk Day Care* opens with two chapters that cite an impressive list of studies defending the appropriateness of day care. Clifford’s definitive conclusions include the following: “The overwhelming evidence is that as long as adequate substitute care of the children is arranged, our fears about maternal employment negatively affecting children are unfounded” (27) and “The conclusion that is evident from the existing body of knowledge is that the preschool years are the critical years for determining the child’s future success” (39). In 1996 Howard Clifford remarked that, just as the opponents of day care had selectively emphasized research that supported their positions, he had selectively emphasized research that supported public investment in high-quality day cares. Even after taking this admission into account, however, *Let’s Talk Day Care* comes across as reasonably balanced.

The municipally run Glengarry Day Care was one of a number of public recreational, social, and health services offered in the Glengarry area. One chapter of *Let’s Talk Day Care* outlines with great enthusiasm the many ways that this day care tied into the other services offered by the city. For example, an OOSC program was operated in conjunction with the day care, mothers in the community could volunteer to work at the day care in order to improve their child care skills, and children in the day care were screened to identify those with developmental delays. The chapter demonstrates how seriously the City of Edmonton took the notion of day care as a preventive social service and how important a PSS day care could be to the quality of life in a working-class community.

Howard Clifford left his City of Edmonton position in the summer of 1972 to become the federal government’s national advisor on day care. He had served as Edmonton’s director of day care for over five years. In an interview conducted at the time of his departure, he opined that Edmonton had “by far the best day-care program in terms of quality” in the country. The strengths of the program,
according to Clifford, were community involvement and the city’s multidisciplinary approach involving health, recreation, education, and social services.24

One of Howard Clifford’s last acts as the city’s day care director was encouraging Edmonton Social Services (ESS) to hire Sheila Campbell to take his place. Campbell had just finished her master’s degree at the University of Alberta (under the supervision of Dr. Meyer Horowitz). She had spent the 1971–72 academic year as the first program head of the new early childhood education (ECE) program at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton. (The program at Mount Royal College in Calgary had started the previous year.) Her duties at the college included designing and teaching all the courses. She decided to apply for the City of Edmonton position after she perceived that an all-male hiring committee had made fun of her candidacy for the position of chair of the community services department at the college.

Sheila Campbell lasted for only one year as the director of day care. “I ran into the old boys’ club at the city,” she remarked, recollecting that she was one of only two women employed by Edmonton at the director level and the only woman in ESS. When she got the notice for her first administrative staff meeting and mentioned her intention to attend, Keith Wass advised her not to go since the meetings involved male administrators playing poker and telling jokes. She was even excluded from the lunches that the other social services administrators regularly enjoyed together. “I heard about things that had happened that had obviously been discussed in the washroom, the beer parlour, someplace. I never had any input.” She was also excluded from input on which day cares should receive grants from money donated to the city by the Edmonton Creche Society. In fact, she recollected that she only found out about the existence of this fund by accident.

Given this unsupportive work environment at the City of Edmonton, Campbell was pleased to accept a term teaching position at the University of Alberta starting in September 1973. Her decision to leave the city was also influenced by her desire for work that involved fewer meetings at night so she could spend more time with her children and by the unrealistic expectations of many members of the day care community who did not realize that it was inappropriate for the director of day care to give them special treatment. In retrospect, Sheila Campbell’s difficult year as an employee of the City of Edmonton in 1972–73 suggests the extent of systemic gender bias in organizations at that time. Indeed, with its commitment to bettering people’s lives, we could reasonably expect ESS to have been more hospitable to female administrators than most organizations.25
Mike Day, already an employee of ESS, became the director of day care in the fall of 1973. At that time, the PSS system of child care in the city consisted of eight day cares with a capacity for 431 preschool children, two OOSC programs that could look after forty-two children, and an FDH program that could accommodate 120 children. The city and United Way also subsidized fifty-eight OOSC spaces outside of the PSS program. However, this supply came nowhere close to meeting the demand for subsidized day care. In 1972 the city had surveyed 2,564 households and found that 29 percent of the families with preschoolers had mothers in the paid labour force. It was estimated, based upon the survey, that there were 10,500 preschoolers in Edmonton in 1973 whose mothers held paid work. In contrast, there were only 1,700 licensed spaces in the city. The gap between need and supply meant that there were long waiting lists at the PSS centres; information centres in Edmonton were fielding over one hundred calls per month from persons seeking child care.

The long waiting lists at PSS centres in 1973 brought together a number of organizations to lobby for an expansion of quality day care. The Community Task Force on Day Care included the Edmonton Day Care Council (EDCC, composed of representatives from each of the PSS centres), the Edmonton After-School Care Association, and the Community League After-School program. They were joined by a grassroots advocacy group, Parents for Day Care, and two advocacy organizations that had been initiated by Sheila Campbell and other professionals, the Edmonton branch of the Canadian Committee on Early Childhood and the AAYC. The movement in Edmonton benefited from the fact that although the AAYC was provincial in mandate, many of its key activists lived in Edmonton and made sure the organization was involved in the movement there. Furthermore, the Edmonton Social Planning Council not only participated in the Community Task Force but also published its report, “Information on Day Care.” In contrast, the movement in Calgary was at a comparative disadvantage since the Social Planning Council in Calgary had been shut down by this time.

In the run-up to the provincial election of 26 March 1975, the provincial government significantly increased the budget for PSS day cares. This allowed Edmonton to undertake a major expansion of its OOSC program: three centres were added in 1974 and two more in 1975. By September 1975, there were seven OOSC centres in the PSS system. Furthermore, the city added two more PSS day cares in 1974 and began subsidizing twelve spaces at the two day cares run by the Centre d’Expérience Préscolaire. In arriving at the count of twelve PSS centres in Edmonton in 1975 (table 4.2), I included the latter two centres.
in the total. Furthermore, the number of spaces in Edmonton’s FDH program had grown to 220.27

Ivor Dent lost his bid for re-election in 1974, but the city council elected that year included three new aldermen who were strong supporters of publicly subsidized day care: Bettie Hewes, who had worked as the executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association in Edmonton from 1964 to 1967 and as a planner and acting director for the Edmonton Social Planning Council between 1967 and her election to council; Ed Kennedy, a priest and educator who directed the Catholic Information Centre in Edmonton; and David Leadbeater, a left-wing economist with MA degrees from the University of Alberta and Oxford University who had been active in student politics while at the University of Alberta.28 With a sympathetic council in place, in 1975 ESS presented an ambitious plan for the expansion of Edmonton’s PSS day care services. It included two alternate expansion scenarios. The first assumed a growth rate in subsidized spaces of 25 percent per year over five years, and the second 50 percent per year. The 25 percent rate predicted a growth in the number of spaces in PSS day cares from 687 (table 4.2) to 1,675 in 1980: OOSC spaces would grow from 217 to 837 and FDH spaces from 220 to 837. The total cost for Edmonton’s PSS day care system in 1980 was projected as $5.26 million, of which the province’s share would be over $1.5 million (at 30 percent cost sharing). Given that the province spent only $1.23 million on PSS day cares in all of Alberta in 1976 (roughly three-eighths of $3,271,000: see table A.1), Edmonton’s expansion plans undoubtedly seemed grandiose to provincial bureaucrats and politicians.

In September 1975, the provincial government had already agreed to fund three additional PSS day cares in Edmonton. In order to meet the objective of 25 percent growth per annum, ESS recommended establishing three new centres in 1976 and two centres per year from 1977 to 1980. The municipal department’s plans, however, went far beyond a major expansion of the spaces in PSS services. It also proposed providing “consultation services to all child care programs regardless of sponsorship” and purchasing subsidized spaces in commercial centres that met “operating standards set near the level of the present subsidized centres.” Under the scenario of 25 percent growth, ESS projected having 837 subsidized spaces in commercial centres by 1980.29

In developing this plan for expansion, the city confronted the difficult issue of how to fund the buildings for a large number of new centres. In the first five years of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), the federal government would only share the costs of staff salaries, staff training, and day care administration. This
The problem faced by Edmonton in 1975 was that the newer suburbs had no community buildings with excess floor space that could house a day care. Therefore, the city had to find ways to include day cares in new buildings constructed in those areas even though building costs were not directly shareable through CAP. ESS eventually decided upon two solutions to this problem. The first was to “borrow the money to cover the cost of constructing daycare facilities and in turn rent the facilities to community boards at a level which would cover the debenture payment.” Of course, the rent paid by the day care would be

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Auspice</th>
<th>Edmonton</th>
<th>Calgary</th>
<th>Rest of Alberta</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(22%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Region as % of total for Alberta</td>
<td>37%</td>
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SOURCe: Calculated from Alberta Social Services and Community Health, Homes and Institutions Branch, “Day Care Centres Operating in the Province of Alberta as of July 1, 1975” (PAA, 83.386, file 12).

NOTE: Here and in other tables, “n.a.” means “not applicable.”
eligible for PSS funding, of which the city’s share was only 20 percent. “Thus the City in the final analysis has to cover only 20 percent of the costs of [a] facility which it will eventually own outright.” The second solution was to “include the requirement for the inclusion of day care facilities in major new developments in which the developer has asked for concessions from the city (such as re-zoning to permit more intensive land use).”

Edmonton did everything it could to orchestrate a major expansion of the PSS day care system in the mid-1970s. The city’s plan, however, was thwarted by the province’s unwillingness to provide operating funds for new PSS day cares. In the first part of 1976, Minister of Social Services Helen Hunley indicated that the province would limit the increase in its PSS day care budget to 8 percent in the 1976–77 budget year. Since inflation at this time was higher than 8 percent, this decision meant that the city would not have enough money to support its existing centres, let alone new ones. This point was made in June 1976, when council debated a bylaw authorizing the expenditure of $200,000 for a new day care facility. Bettie Hewes was among the aldermen who opposed constructing the facility since the city could not afford to operate it without PSS support. In contrast, Alderman Ed Kennedy “urged the city to spotlight the funding problem by building a new centre, not opening it and closing a couple of existing centres.”

Only two of the three PSS day cares planned for 1976 opened that year, bringing the total number of PSS day cares in the city to fourteen in the spring of 1977 (line 7, table 4.1). Furthermore, the plan for succeeding years was derailed by the province’s funding curbs. Had the PSS operational funds been available in 1977–78, Edmonton would have been well on its way toward sustaining a 25 percent or higher growth rate in subsidized spaces between 1976 and 1980.

Edmonton’s model system of subsidized day care stagnated in the first half of 1977 due to lack of new funding. Recognizing the impasse in the spring of 1977, Alderman David Leadbeater proposed to city council “that the City open sixty new daycare spaces at fees equivalent to actual cost.” The motion was referred to ESS. The department costed the idea based upon capital costs equivalent to building a new facility and estimated that parents would have to be charged $309 per month to recover the costs. The department concluded that such a fee would “render patronage improbable.”

David Leadbeater rebuked the department for its action on his motion. First, he believed the cost of $309 per month was “highly misleading” because such a day care could be located in a facility built to specifications by a private developer as part of a development agreement and because “initiative [could] be taken to
find means of scrounging, borrowing, building or gifting necessary furnishings.” Second, he asserted that if the department had consulted with day care workers or supervisors, it would have discovered that “there are persons willing to pay full cost day care in sufficient numbers to make the proposal ‘viable.’” Leadbeater’s analysis suggests that if the department had wanted to make a full-cost-recovery centre seem attractive and worth pursuing, it could have easily done so. This is a case where an alderman was far more creative than municipal civil servants in responding to a crisis in provincial funding of PSS day cares.34

The politics of day care underwent an almost complete change in Edmonton between 1975 and 1978. In 1975 the City of Edmonton had taken the initiative on day care with its ambitious plan to expand the number of subsidized, high-quality spaces over five years from 1,124 to 4,186. By early 1978, the province had indubitably seized the initiative with its new plan to allow subsidized children to enrol in any licensed centre. David Gilbert took over from Mike Day as Edmonton’s director of day care in the summer of 1977. Among his first duties was attending a meeting with provincial civil servants that sketched the provincial government’s plans for policy change. Therefore, the city was well aware of the general direction of the new provincial policy on day care before it was announced in March 1978.

David Gilbert wrote a detailed memo on his meeting with provincial officials on 10 August 1977. (The meeting was also attended by Sam Blakely, representing Calgary.) The memo was circulated to the other senior managers in the department, including general manager Ande Dorosh, who had taken over earlier that year when Keith Wass moved into City Planning. Gilbert offered this assessment: “It is clear the Minister is scared of being unable to control the rising cost of day care. She has elected to choose a system of mediocrity, a ‘levelling down’ to a minimum standard, and a determination to de-escalate the process of better quality day care through the present municipal structure.”35 The city did manage to add two more day cares to its PSS system in the latter part of 1977, bringing its total to sixteen centres. Furthermore, the number of funded after-school programs grew to thirteen during the 1977–78 school year. Nevertheless, ESS informed newly elected Mayor Cec Purves in December 1977 that “continuing programmes of fiscal restraint will continue to weaken services which provide strength and support to the family.”36

On 13 March 1978, Minister Helen Hunley revealed the new licensing standards that would accompany the portable subsidy system. The province’s proposed new staff-to-child ratios, indoor/outdoor space requirements, and staff
qualification requirements were lower than Edmonton’s standards for PSS centres, and the Edmonton Day Care Council (EDCC) soon came out in opposition. Of particular concern to the EDCC was the indication that the maximum monthly subsidy in the new system would be $190 per month. Because the cost per child in Edmonton’s PSS centres was in the $240–70 range, EDCC President Dorothy Keith predicted that “subsidized centres will have to lower standards, lower income parents will have to pay more when they are barely able to manage present fees, or charity drives will have to be held.” The EDCC immediately began to mobilize parents with children in the PSS day cares. A leaflet unfavourably compared the proposed new provincial regulations to the existing city guidelines, and listed the following options:

- Close subsidized centres
- Lay off staff and lower salaries
- Do a lot of fund raising ($20,000 per year, which is impossible)
- Lower our standards to new provincial regulations
- Fight to keep our present standards

Parents were urged to write letters of protest, and the EDCC circulated a petition that asked city council to get the province to respect municipal autonomy over the subsidy system for PSS day cares. It was submitted in late March with 548 signatures.37

The city’s Day Care Branch formally responded to the new licensing standards in April 1978. It echoed the criticisms of the EDCC and employed sarcasm to convey disdain for the province’s approach:

It should be noted that the impact of the Day Care Regulation on the provision of Day Care services in Edmonton will be minimal. Parents may be assured that their children will be cared for not more than one level below ground, by someone who doesn’t smoke, in a room that is not accessible only by ladder, folding stairs or trap door, and located within walking distance of a playground. The Regulation will not ensure adequate care for children in Day Care services, and may not provide the necessary protection for their custodial care.38

At its meeting on 23 May 1978, Edmonton City Council decided that it would not accept the province’s new subsidy system and regulations as proposed but would negotiate “to develop a mutually acceptable system for subsidizing low
income families.” This quickly led to a series of meetings that culminated in Minister Hunley directly addressing city council on 26 June. The latter action shows how badly the provincial government wanted to strike a deal with Edmonton prior to the official starting date of the new day care system, 1 July. However, city council steadfastly supported the position of its bureaucrats and refused to accept the province’s plan as it stood. The Day Care Branch prepared a document that “outlined desirable standards to day care services in Edmonton and spelled out the basis for negotiations with the province over day care.” It was endorsed by council on 15 August 1978.39

The document stated that “the City of Edmonton wishes to establish a distinctive program within provincial guidelines.” It specified areas where the city would accept the provincial program and areas where the city was “not prepared to change.” The six points on the latter list included (1) municipality to set standards to any day care that receives municipal funding and (2) not-for-profit programs to have priority for funding.40

At this point, however, negotiations between the province and city ground to a halt. Mayor Purves was not able to arrange another meeting with Minister Hunley until late January 1979.41 By 1978 John Lackey was a director-general in the provincial Department of SSCH. He had worked behind the scenes to break the impasse between the province and the city, and on 18 December 1978, recommended to Chief Deputy Minister Mansbridge “that provincial policy explicitly grant municipalities the option to set municipal conditions on the operation of daycare centres.” Lackey’s proposal was to give municipalities the latitude to set conditions that fell outside the provincial regulation: “to request that operators establish parent boards, join a municipal Day Care Association, encourage staff to access available training sessions, etc.”42 The Policy and Planning Committee of SSCH agreed to Lackey’s proposal on 5 January 1979. The specific language adopted was “The Province recognizes the municipal right to establish conditions as long as regulations and fee schedule guidelines, etc., are respected and as long as conditions don’t render hardship on users.” Edmonton’s Day Care Branch interpreted the new language on municipal conditions as a “significant” modification of the province’s position even though it recognized that “the implications of this change in policy are unclear.”43

By the time Albertans were preparing to vote in the provincial election of 14 March 1979, the province and the city had declared a truce in their acrimonious fight over day care. Although Edmonton—unlike Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie (line 10, table 4.1)—did not plan to join the new system on
1 April 1979, it had at least agreed to adopt the new provincial fee schedule (the maximum monthly fee was set at $210 for infants and $190 for preschoolers; see table A.6) and to accept provincial guidelines for determining who was eligible for subsidization. The Day Care Branch wrote on 6 March that “there remains an urgent need to define the specific operating conditions and ensure a meaningful role for the municipality.” Nevertheless, the accommodating approach taken by Lackey, Mansbridge, and Hunley in the winter of 1979 suggested that Edmonton’s full participation in the new system could be negotiated without further confrontation. But the truce turned out to be temporary. Helen Hunley did not run in the 1979 election and was replaced by a new minister, Bob Bogle. As is detailed in chapter 5, Bogle was unwilling to pursue the conciliatory approach of his predecessor, and soon the City of Edmonton was once again at loggerheads with the province.

Calgary

Edmonton took the lead in establishing PSS day cares between 1967 and 1969. The response of CSS was to work to establish PSS day cares in Calgary that were even better than those in Edmonton. The first version of the City of Calgary’s “Day Care Policy and Guidelines” was adopted by city council in October 1969. It specified standards for day cares and FDHs that were superior to the licensing standards of the province.

Even before the Bowness-Montgomery project was approved (see chapter 3), Calgary proposed establishing a municipally run day care along with a social service unit in its first large-scale public housing project. The day care at the Shaganappi Village housing project was Calgary’s answer to Edmonton’s municipally run Glengarry Day Care. Then, in early 1970, the city supported proposals for a community day care at Pleasant Heights United Church and a day care at Mount Royal College. In fact, the college’s day care, organized by the Students’ Association, opened in February, before any government funding was in place. It was the first day care at a community college in Canada.

Meanwhile, the innovative Bowness-Montgomery Day Care and FDH project opened on 1 May 1970 under the directorship of Nancy Hall. Like Mary Hull at Edmonton’s CDN, Nancy Hall had trained as a nursery nurse in England. After emigrating to Canada in 1957 with her husband and young children, Hall had continued to work with children in various capacities. She moved
to Calgary from Hay River, Northwest Territories, to take up her position at Bowness-Montgomery and would remain there until 1976. The two programs at Bowness-Montgomery soon became well established. On 1 December 1970, there were forty-six children in the day care and another forty-three in satellite FDHS (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 25).

Because it was a community-run project that was designed to serve as a model day care, Bowness-Montgomery played an important role in the development of day care in the early 1970s. For instance, the first cohort of ECE students from Mount Royal College commenced field placements at the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care in October 1970, and the project was visited during its first few months of operation by individuals involved in getting the Shaganappi and Pleasant Heights day cares up and running, by “a group from Toronto who were conducting a survey on day home projects,” and by groups from Lethbridge and Drumheller who were looking at establishing day cares (Brouwer and McDiarmid 1970, 26). Two other factors enhanced the profile of the Bowness-Montgomery project at this time. The first was the involvement of women’s organizations like the Junior League of Calgary. Nancy Hall cultivated that support by designating Friday afternoons, beginning at three o’clock, as an open house “for anyone who is interested in the centre and who would like to become familiar with this type of child development program.” The centre used volunteers from these groups to help organize conventional fundraising events such as the auction of donated items held in November 1970. Second, both the members of the B-MDCA Board and Nancy Hall herself were committed to advocacy and education beyond the confines of their own project. The board was represented at the Poor People’s Conference sponsored by the federal government in Toronto in January 1971, and Hall was regularly interviewed by the press, including, on a number of occasions, future premier Ralph Klein, then a reporter for CFCN-TV.

By the end of 1970, five PSS day cares were operating in Calgary. However, the capacity of these centres came nowhere close to meeting the burgeoning need for day care in the city. Since subsidized care was only available in PSS programs, low-income families were forced to look for an inexpensive commercial alternative if they could not secure spaces in a PSS centre or day home. As a consequence, the number of licensed commercial day cares in Calgary grew from approximately forty in 1970 to sixty-five in 1975 (table 4.2). Most of these centres, however, did not accept children less than two years of age (since it was much more profitable to care for older children at a staff-to-child ratio of one to twenty than younger children at a ratio of one to ten). Because of this, many working parents with
younger children were forced to arrange for care in small day homes and illegal
day cares, such as the infamous Boutique Children’s Hotel, where, in November
1971, provincial child welfare workers discovered thirteen children, including
seven infants less than one year of age, being cared for in a garage without any
running water (Langford 2003a, 16).

The growth of the PSS system of day cares in Calgary in the early 1970s was
driven not only by a supportive municipal bureaucracy and government but also
by a strong grassroots movement. One indication of the strength of the move-
ment was the traffic into Al Hagan’s office at city hall. In 1978 he recalled, “It
used to be that I’d come to work and there’d be about six people in my office
to bug me about some issue or other.” A second indication was the militancy
of an organizing group at the University of Calgary at the beginning of the
school year in 1970. After the university failed to take the initiative in organiz-
ing child care on campus, the Women’s Liberation Group threatened to occupy
a dining room on campus for the purpose of co-operative child care. The tactic
focussed media attention on the problem and even sparked an editorial in one
of Calgary’s daily newspapers, The Albertan, that was highly critical of the uni-
versity administration.51

Support for government-subsidized PSS day cares in Calgary, however, was
far from universal. The matter received a thorough public airing in 1971 after
Louis Lebel, an oil industry executive who was an appointed member of the city’s
Social Service Committee, stated that the city-funded day care programs were
“gold-plated” and “too blasted expensive.”52 An analysis of the written submis-
sions made to the committee allows us to map who was supporting and who
was opposing Calgary’s approach to day care during the formative years of the
PSS program.

Unqualified opposition to the city’s involvement in provision of child care
was restricted to four submissions from commercial operators and twenty-seven
from parents and grandparents whose children were in commercial centres
(some of them with multiple signatures). Only five commercial day cares were
mentioned by name in these documents, indicating that the efforts to mobilize
clients were restricted to a few activist owners.

Support for Calgary’s day care policies came from a wider coalition of groups
than did opposition. The critical submissions from commercial operators and
their clients were almost evenly balanced by favourable submissions from the
clients of PSS centres (twenty-two submissions) and the boards of those cen-
tres (four submissions). In addition, supportive submissions came from four
other categories of advocates. The first was voluntary organizations such as the Calgary Local Council of Women and the Calgary United Fund. A second category comprised six scientific authorities offering expert opinion in areas such as medicine, psychology, economics, and social work. Third were individual citizens (eleven submissions), many of whom went out of their way to frame their arguments in a way that emphasized their public-mindedness rather than self-interest. Finally, CSS advocated for its existing approach to day care.

There is a great deal of overlap between the categories of supporters of quality day care in Calgary in 1971 and in Edmonton in 1967 at the time of the controversy over funding the Glengarry Day Care. The one exception is the greater prominence of scientific authorities in the Calgary debate. These authorities included Dr. Gerald Holman, then a professor and head of the division of pediatrics in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary, as well as the director of pediatrics at the Foothills Hospital. He argued, “Although it is recognized that quality day care requires significant funding, the expanded body of evidence which clearly indicates the first five years of a child's life is critical to its ultimate development as a future citizen, clearly shows the need for the provision of high quality programs for all those children who may need them.” Like Dr. Holman, most of the scientific experts made general reference to research findings, and the submissions from the Alberta Guidance Clinic (a division of the provincial government’s Mental Health Department) reported on four completed or current research projects in Calgary on topics such as the effects of day care on IQ scores.53

Given the polarization of views presented to the Social Services Committee, it is not surprising that its members were also polarized in their recommendations. The majority supported the city’s standards, although they expressed a desire to cut public costs in the future by subsidizing commercial centres that met those standards rather than building new PSS centres. This majority recommendation was accepted by city council by a vote of seven to four on 20 September 1971.54 The idea of subsidizing high-quality commercial day care would be regularly aired between 1971 and 1978 by Calgary’s civil servants and politicians. It was never implemented, however: the province never latched onto the idea, presumably because, under the terms of CAP, the provincial government would have been forced to pay a much larger percentage of the costs of subsidized day care in commercial centres than in not-for-profit centres. Furthermore, the idea was never advocated by the associations representing commercial operators. This is understandable for two reasons: first, it would have divided the commercial sector between subsidized, higher-quality centres and unsubsidized, lower-
quality centres; second, it would not have markedly improved the bottom line of newly subsidized commercial centres since the revenue they would have gained from accepting subsidized children would have been more than offset by the cost of meeting the higher city standards in areas such as staff-to-child ratios and staff training.

Many of the commercial day cares that existed in Calgary in the 1960s grew out of the movement for kindergarten education and thus offered good quality programs. As the number of commercial centres increased in the late 1960s and 1970s, however, so did the variability in the quality of care. In 1972 Irmtraud Walter decided to buy an existing commercial day care in Calgary. She had a strong background in the field, having completed a two-year training course in Germany and having worked at the Happy Times and Fairyland day cares in Calgary during the 1960s. Walter would eventually buy Charleswood Day Nursery and operate it continuously for thirty years. But before she purchased that centre, she looked at others, including one located in a residential area just south of downtown. Her visit to that centre remained vivid in her memory three decades later:

When I walked in that day care I was just shocked. And I even phoned Social Services [and asked]: “How can you license a place like that?” It was extremely bad and I couldn’t even see how parents could leave a child in a place like that. It had holes in the floor, curtains ripped down, the bathroom you smelled for miles away and dirty rings in the toilets and the potties in the corners. And the children had these army cots that you folded out and there was no sheets, no blankets, no nothing. And two children lying down on one cot, one with the head this way, one the other. And one staff in the kitchen.55

A second example of highly questionable care in a commercial day care in Calgary was documented by a mother in 1974. She informed the operator that her son was being withdrawn from the centre “due to your sadistical [sic] form of punishment (washing his mouth out with soap), which you told me you did, and a very noticeable swollen lip which you could not account for in our telephone conversation.”56 These two examples illustrate just how wide a gap in quality there was between the PSS centres and the worst (at least I hope these are examples of the worst) of the commercial centres.

Commercial day care in Calgary was a highly profitable business in the 1970s because demand far exceeded supply, very few staff members were needed to look
after a large number of children, and there were no staff training requirements. Nancy Hall said that she employed seventeen staff to care for the sixty children at the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care. In contrast, Calgary’s first day care chain, Mother Duck’s Day Care, apparently employed four staff to look after the same number of children at one of its three licensed centres. The profits made in commercial day care were so great in the early 1970s that Al Hagan remembers thinking to himself, “Why am I in this [the counsellor’s job]? I should quit and open a few daycare centres now that I have the knowledge to do that.”

The 1970s brought a continuous expansion of PSS day cares in Calgary. Between 1970 and 1974, five new day cares opened, four of them administered by community boards and one by the city (like Shaganappi, the Bridgeland Day Care was connected to a municipal housing project). Two of the new day cares also served as hubs for satellite FDH programs. As a consequence, in November 1974, Calgary had ten PSS day cares with a capacity for 552 children and four FDH projects with a capacity for 215 children. The total cost of these projects was $826,000, with the city responsible for 20 percent. At the end of 1974, less than six months prior to a provincial election, the provincial government promised to share the costs of a $212,500 expansion for PSS day care in Calgary. This money was used to open two new day cares, bring an existing not-for-profit day care into the PSS system, and expand the capacity of some of the existing PSS projects. As is recorded in table 4.2, there were thirteen PSS day cares in Calgary by the middle of 1975, with a capacity for 818 children. At that point, Calgary had 131 more PSS day care spaces than Edmonton and ninety-two more than in all of the rest of Alberta. Furthermore, the province had approved two additional day cares and two additional day home projects. Including these approved projects, Calgary’s PSS system of child care consisted of fifteen centres with a capacity for 854 children and six FDH projects with a capacity for 365 children. The number of licensed commercial spaces in Calgary in 1975 was 2,302, 69 percent of all centre spaces in the city (table 4.2). When approved and FDH spaces are included in the calculation, the commercial sector still controlled 66 percent of the licensed capacity.

The rapid expansion of PSS day care in Calgary in the early 1970s quickly led to the situation where spending on day care exceeded spending on all other PSS projects combined. In 1973 three Calgary representatives proposed to the minister of HSD, Neil Crawford, “that day care services be separated in some manner from the Preventive Social Service budget,” and the minister committed to having his department study the proposal, “since the financial needs in day care presently consume over fifty percent of the total budget and there is
no doubt that the day care needs will continue to increase substantially in the future.” The province eventually chose, in 1978, to not only separate the funding for day care from other PSS projects (as the city requested) but to remove day care from the PSS program entirely.

The city’s efforts on day care in the mid-1970s were complemented by continuing community activism. For example, in 1974 a group called PLAY (People Looking After Youth) secured a Local Initiatives Project grant from the federal government to cover the start-up costs for a day care in the inner-city neighbourhood of Hillhurst-Sunnyside. The problem with these grants, however, was that they could not be used to cover the ongoing operating expenses of a day care. When the grant ended, the community group was forced to run the day care on a “shoestring budget,” relying extensively on volunteer labour from parents. For a brief time, the PLAY day care was even held up by Alderman Barbara Scott as a low-cost alternative to the PSS system of day cares, but the community group willingly joined the PSS system in 1975. A second example occurred in the same Calgary neighbourhood. In 1975 the Hillhurst-Sunnyside Community Association secured a grant of $2.25 million from the federal government’s Urban Renewal Program. It was used to construct a multiservice centre and a social housing project, and to expand the community hall. The expanded hall included a not-for-profit day care that was never incorporated into the PSS system.

In December 1974, after the municipal election, the City of Calgary’s Community Services Committee held a public meeting on Calgary Social Service’s proposals for increased standards in PSS day cares. Two groups of commercial operators used the meeting to express their displeasure with the PSS system: the DCAC and the Mother Duck’s and Panda commercial chains, represented by Dennis Sorensen, owner of Mother Duck’s. This was one of the meetings where Nancy Hall of the B-MDCA and Dennis Sorensen went head to head. Although a few of the speakers at the meeting, including a spokesperson for the Coordinating Child Development Council, supported the draft guidelines, Sam Blakely stated that “he was disappointed the people who seemed to be interested in establishing standards did not attend.”

A decision on the matter of raising or lowering standards was made at the Children’s Services Committee meeting in January. Just prior to that meeting, Alderman Barbara Scott presented a list of points that she hoped would “provide a useful framework” for making the decision. When Scott had been elected to city council in 1971, she had been a proponent of developing “Calgary’s child services
to a level that has been shown through research and experimentation across North America, to contribute most effectively to children’s sound physical, social and personal growth and well-being.” During her first term in office, however, she turned into a meddlesome opponent of CSS’s development of PSS day cares. In 1975 she called for the city to “cease operation forthwith of City-operated daycare centres” and to turn those centres (Shaganappi and Bridgeland) over to community groups. This recommendation was consistent with her philosophy that less government was better. “She always had a thing about the department being involved where others could do it,” noted Al Hagan. Interestingly, however, Alderman Scott did not merely want the department to cease operating day cares; she wanted it to close “its day care division as a special project.”

Barb Scott also opposed, in principle, the city specifying its own standards for PSS day cares (although she favoured the retention of reduced city standards until the province’s standards were upgraded to meet them). In her view, the city should end its policy of higher standards because it “should not discriminate” against children who did not attend the PSS centres. In making this argument, Scott turned her back on her own history as an advocate for PSS day cares: she rejected the notion that governments should fund high-quality day care as a preventive social service for low-income Calgarians.

Alderman Barb Scott’s approach proved to be very influential, as did the lobbying of commercial operators. The Albertan reported that the Children’s Services Committee “abandoned most of the Social Services Department’s recommendations for standards” and asked the department to find “ways to make the regulations even more acceptable.” The committee also “rejected any position that would imply they think the private day care operators are not doing an adequate job.” However, Alderman Scott failed to convince her colleagues to get rid of the municipally run centres or the department’s day care division.

In the summer of 1975, the Children’s Services Committee, and then city council, voted to reduce the staff-to-child ratios in the city’s PSS centres (for instance, the ratio for three to six year olds was reduced to one to twelve from one to ten) and to give a greater role to both volunteers and employees without formal training. It is noteworthy that the new ratio for three to six year olds was still closer to the guidelines of the Canadian Council on Social Development (one to nine for children between thirty months and four years, and one to twelve for five year olds) than to the Alberta licensing requirement of one to twenty. Nevertheless, advocates for quality care were unhappy with the change and attacked Alderman Scott for leading the campaign to reduce standards. Interestingly, the reduction
in staff-to-child ratios did not mean that each of the city’s PSS centres was able to immediately increase its capacity. Other standards, such as the requirement that there be one wash basin for every ten children, meant that capacity could not be increased until “more capital funding from the province became available for alterations” (Bella 1980, 9). It is noteworthy that municipal civil servants failed to mention at any time during the policy discussions in 1974–75 that immediate increases in the capacity of PSS centres required changes in facility standards to accompany changes in staff-to-child ratios.  

Overall, the policy debates in 1974–75 were quite different from those in 1971. First, the later debates dragged out for almost two years rather than being concluded in less than a year, thus allowing opposition to build. Second, not nearly as many community organizations and ordinary citizens advocated on behalf of the city’s system of PSS day cares and day homes. And, third, the opponents of PSS day care commanded considerable support on city council. Given these factors, the best that municipal civil servants could do was to minimize the damage by fashioning compromises between Scott’s proposals and the existing standards, and by being somewhat less than forthcoming about the ways that facility standards would prevent the immediate enrolment of more children in some day cares even after staff-to-child ratios were decreased.  

In 1976 and 1977, the provincial government slowly moved toward raising its licensing standards and changing the way it funded day cares. The expertise of Calgary’s civil servants was recognized when Eric Haffenden, Calgary’s day care consultant and the chair of the AAYC’s board of directors, was appointed by the province to be a member of the Day Care Task Force that reported in April 1977. He was the only municipal bureaucrat on the task force.  

By 1977 Calgary was sponsoring fifteen day cares (line 7, table 4.1) and six FDH projects through PSS. Furthermore, planning for another PSS day care (Connaught) was relatively advanced and four OOSC centres were receiving limited PSS funding. 69 Despite its commitment to the PSS system of child care, however, CSS knew that the provincial government intended to follow the task force’s recommendation that commercial centres be eligible to accept subsidized children (ADCTF 1977, 17). In anticipation of provincial action, and perhaps in the hope of influencing the final form of the province’s new system, CSS put forward a new plan to increase the number of subsidized day care spaces in Calgary from 900 to 1,600. The 700 new spaces would be purchased from commercial day cares or FDH agencies that met the province’s new standards (the city expected these standards to follow the recommendations of the task force, and thus be
The 1970s

The 1970s

quite a bit higher than the licensing standards then in existence). City council approved the plan in January 1978. However, the city had no intention of proceeding with this initiative until it secured the province’s commitment to cover 80 percent of the $1.5 million cost.70

When the province’s new day care standards were announced in March 1978, Calgary’s civil servants were as dismayed as their counterparts in Edmonton. On 12 May 1978, Sam Blakely wrote a long letter to John Lackey. One paragraph dealt with staff-to-child ratios:

The child-staff ratios in the new regulations are absolutely distressing. The report of the Day Care Task Force represented a compromise position to the City of Calgary standards. We were prepared to accept such compromise on condition that the principle of encouraging better care in accordance with children’s needs was understood. The new regulations not only go below the minimum recommended by the Task Force, but neglect the direction that parents and caregivers should strive for and be given incentive to exceed the standards. This places our department in the position where we have serious reservations about supporting or enforcing such a set of standards.71

CSS attacked the new regulations at a special meeting of the Community Services Committee in early June. Sam Blakely argued that the new regulations were aimed at getting women off welfare and not at giving good child care. Despite their reservations about the proposed standards, however, Calgary’s municipal bureaucrats anticipated that the city would soon agree to participate in the new day care program. At the next meeting of the Community Services Committee, they recommended that money be set aside so that the city could take over the licensing of day cares. Calgary’s civil servants were evidently far more pragmatic in their opposition than were their counterparts in Edmonton.

On 13 June 1978, the Community Services Committee voted to recommend that city council reject the provincial standards and negotiate with the province for improvements. The dynamics of this meeting were influenced by a protest organized by PSS day cares. Approximately four hundred people, many of them mothers with young children, rallied at city hall and attended the meeting to support the position of CSS. Among the messages on placards carried by the young children were “Where’s All the Oil Money Pete??” and “Must Alberta Always Have Lowest Day-Care Standards?” On the other hand, a number of Calgary’s commercial operators publicly supported the new regulations and condemned the
opposition of the PSS sector. Among these operators was Caroline Kiehlbauch of the DCAC, who had been a member of the ADCTF along with Eric Haffenden. A former president of the DCAC, Kurt Darmohray of Marlborough Day Nursery, wrote that it would be a good thing if the PSS centres had to lower their staff-to-child ratio since “they have too many on the staff anyway.”

City council considered the matter on 26 June 1978. Prior to that meeting, Mayor Ross Alger accompanied a provincial cabinet minister on a visit to three (presumably commercial) day cares. The mayor cast the deciding vote when council decided to join the new provincial day care system, thereby rejecting the recommendation of the Community Services Committee that participation be subject to further negotiation. Calgary thus became the first municipality to agree to participate in the new day care program and in September 1978, the city was allocated provincial funds to establish a new municipally administered system of portable day care subsidies. Later that month, over Alderman Scott’s objections, city council decided that CSS should take on the task of licensing day cares; Calgary was the first—and ultimately the only—municipality to do so (line 11, table 4.1).

The day care policies and politics in Calgary during the 1970s had several distinctive features. First, there was a stronger emphasis in Calgary than anywhere else in Alberta on day care as a focus for community development. Second, Calgary led the way in linking FDH programs to day cares so that children could obtain continuous care from one agency between birth and twelve years of age. Third, although Calgary developed more PSS day cares than Edmonton, it was well behind Edmonton in the number of other not-for-profit day cares (see table 4.2), so the not-for-profit sector was considerably smaller in Calgary than in Edmonton. Fourth, partly as a result of the third feature, the commercial sector was larger and more politically active in Calgary than anywhere else in the province and exercised increasing influence on public debates and policy decisions as the decade progressed.

Medicine Hat

Between 1970 and 1973, Medicine Hat had only one PSS day care, the community-run Medicine Hat Day Care (MHDC). At the beginning of 1970, four months after it opened, forty-two children attended this facility, which was licensed for fifty. Since the only licensed commercial day care in the city had recently closed, parents had to turn to the new MHDC for licensed care. Fortunately,
MHDC was located in an old school building that could be licensed for many more children. The capacity was increased to sixty in November 1970, but by the following October, this number of spaces was inadequate. To ensure that high-priority children could be enrolled in the centre, some unsubsidized children even lost their places. In June 1972, the facility’s license was increased again, this time to 101. For the time being, this soaked up the demand for day care in Medicine Hat and discouraged any would-be entrepreneurs from establishing a commercial centre.

Two other events in 1972 caused day care in Medicine Hat to move in a unique direction. First, the city’s original PSS director, John Millar, retired and was replaced by Bob Wanner, who had recently completed a master’s degree in social policy at McMaster University. Whereas Millar had established the city's first PSS day care in 1969 as community run, Wanner saw considerable advantages to the municipal administration of PSS day cares. Second, the city conducted a large survey of the need for day care in Medicine Hat: over five thousand interviews were conducted. The interest in and support for day care evidenced in this survey, while not overwhelming, was sufficient to support expansion of the PSS system.

What is particularly interesting about the survey is that it did not generate very many general comments about the controversial nature of day care. While a few negative opinions were recorded (e.g., “Day Care not necessary—mother should stay at home” and “Taxpayers should not have to pay for this”), they were balanced by some highly positive opinions (e.g., “Best thing started in this city”). In 1972–73, opposition to Medicine Hat’s involvement in day care was not a significant political force. Unlike the situations in Edmonton and Calgary at that time, there were no commercial day cares in Medicine Hat and hence no owners who were motivated by their investments to fight city bureaucrats at every turn.

The forty-one extra spaces added to the MHDC in June 1972 quickly filled up, and by January of the next year, the day care had a waiting list. In response, the board of directors recommended to the city “that the day care program be expanded into neighbourhood areas.” City council approved a plan to establish four small centres (with an aggregate capacity of one hundred children) in different parts of the city.

In preparation for the establishment of the new centres, the city assumed administration of the MHDC at the beginning of 1974. Susan Costea, formerly the executive director of the MHDC, was appointed the coordinator of Medicine Hat Day Care Services and took on the many tasks associated with opening four new centres. Two of the new centres opened at about the same time in December
1974 and January 1975; the other two opened in September 1975 and February 1976. Altogether the four new centres were licensed for 130 children. The expansion allowed the city to reduce enrolment at the original MHDC to a more manageable 71 children. According to Bob Wanner, Medicine Hat went the route of direct administration of day cares in order to make it easier to coordinate child care with other community services and to further the cause of pay equity for day care workers.\textsuperscript{77}

The city was certainly fortunate that it conceived and began implementing its plan for the decentralized expansion of day care services in the run-up to the March 1975 provincial election. For one thing, the Lougheed government sharply increased its spending on PSS day cares at this time (table A.1). Furthermore, given that the Medicine Hat-Redcliff constituency had been handily won by the Social Credit candidate in 1971, the Lougheed government showed no aversion to new PSS spending in Medicine Hat in late 1974 and early 1975 in order to bolster the chances of the Progressive Conservative candidate, Jim Horsman. As it turned out, every dollar of extra spending seemed to be necessary, since Horsman won the constituency by only 130 votes in 1975. The key change in the voting patterns between the two elections was the sharp decline in the NDP’s share of the popular vote from a healthy 16 percent in 1971 to an inconsequential 3 percent in 1975 (Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta 1983, 104, 112). New provincial spending on day cares in Medicine Hat would have appealed to a significant proportion of the voters who switched from the NDP to the Tories in that election.\textsuperscript{78}

By the mid-1970s, day care in Medicine Hat looked nothing like day care in any other city in the province. For one thing, the doubling of licensed capacity in the PSS system meant that the municipal program could begin serving “all families who wished to use the facilities rather than just low income or single parent families.” Consequently, middle- and upper-income families could enroll their children in the PSS day cares in Medicine Hat without worrying that their children would get bumped by subsidized children. Indeed, in the spring of 1977, the city formalized a policy of reserving 10 to 15 percent of spaces for children of full-fee parents “in order to ensure a cross section of clientele.”\textsuperscript{79}

Day care in Medicine Hat in the mid- to late 1970s was also unique because it was closely associated with early childhood services (ECS) programs for children between four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half years of age. ECS, or kindergarten, was a voluntary program, but the provincial government was committed to funding enough ECS spaces to serve all those children who were enrolled by
their parents. In late 1973 the city hired a “temporary ECS coordinator” to study the need for ECS programs and “work with various groups of parents in the city wanting services for preschoolers, etc.” When, in 1975, the Medicine Hat School District decided against sponsoring ECS programs because it feared that the cost to local taxpayers would be too great, the city was a logical choice to fill the gap, becoming the only Alberta municipality to take on this role. By 1977 Medicine Hat operated ten ECS programs, six in schools, two in churches, one in a day care, and one in a senior citizens’ complex. Bob Wanner estimated in the spring of 1977 that 85 to 90 percent of all children in Medicine Hat between four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half years of age were enrolled in a city-run ECS or day care, and municipal civil servants had big plans to integrate the two programs. Their idea was to build neighbourhood community centres that would include recreation facilities, a day care, and a kindergarten.

But while the plan may have been visionary in terms of community services planning, it was hatched with little consultation with staff and parents, particularly in the ECS programs. Consequently, it provoked vigorous opposition from the members of the ECS Co-ordinating Council, whose chair stated, “The city bureaucracy is not prepared yet to accept parent involvement in decision making. That’s a hell of a conception of democracy.” This episode shows the political dangers inherent in the municipal administration of services for young children. Parents are intensely involved in the lives of their preschool children. When parents run a day care or kindergarten directly, civil servants must necessarily consult and collaborate with those parents when changes are being contemplated. In contrast, when civil servants run the show and parents are restricted to an advisory role, it is quite possible for civil servants to miss some of the necessary stages of consultation and hence alienate those parents.

In 1978 Medicine Hat hired Al Hagan from Calgary to run its community services division. With Hagan’s commitment to community development and his expertise in day care, the city was in a position to repair its relations with staff and parents, and to get its ambitious plan back on track. However, the province’s decision that year to end PSS sponsorship of day cares meant that the plan to integrate educational and recreational services became financially unfeasible. The city continued to administer the ECS programs until 1983, when they were turned over to the Medicine Hat School District.

One important area where PSS day care in Medicine Hat in the 1970s lagged behind Edmonton and Calgary was that of quality standards. For its first few years, the MHDC operated with staff-to-child ratios equivalent to the province’s
licensing requirement: one to ten for babies and toddlers, and one to twenty for older children. Looking back on this situation in 1994, Susan Costea reported, “These ratios were highly ineffective and little besides basic feeding and toilet training was accomplished.”

In her 1973 report as MHDC executive director, Costea recognized the limitations in the quality of care offered at the day care: “The MHDC has had a high child-staff ratio and low salaries which has accounted for the tremendous turnover in staff in the past year, “ she wrote. “Due to the large turnover of staff we have encountered much difficulty operating with untrained and inexperienced staff.” The ratios were improved for the first time in 1973–74, when the MHDC was able to hire five additional staff members using a six-month Local Initiatives Program grant. Costea reported, “We have noticed a remarkable change in the children with two staff in a room and are able to catch problems before they become habits.”

While Susan Costea did not have advanced training in ECE, her successor in the position of co-ordinator of day care services, Karen Charlton, believed that “[Susan] had the vision. The kids should have good care and they had that care.” Beginning in the early 1970s, Costea encouraged the staff to take continuing education courses through Medicine Hat College and to attend workshops. She also provided in-service training. Nevertheless, the first two employees with an early childhood development (ECD) or ECE certificate (awarded upon completion of a one-year course) were not hired until 1975, and the first employee with a ECE diploma (awarded upon completion of a two-year course) was not hired until 1977. Therefore, right through the 1970s, the vast majority of the employees in Medicine Hat’s PSS day cares had not completed a college course in the field.

Karen Charlton was that first employee with a college diploma. She had moved to Calgary to get her college education from Mount Royal College, since Medicine Hat College at that time did not offer a one-year certificate, let alone a two-year diploma, in ECE. She started working as a child development worker for the City of Medicine Hat in June 1977. Two decades later she noted that “there wasn’t a person in the system who didn’t care about kids, but there were lots of people in the system that didn’t understand child development and how to foster that.” In 1978, when Medicine Hat College started offering its one-year certificate course in ECD, eighteen of the twenty-three full-time child care workers in Medicine Hat’s five day cares did not hold a certificate or diploma in the field. The city adopted a new salary schedule in August 1978 that provided considerable
financial incentive for these eighteen staff members to pursue the certificate. That year, five staff took leaves and enrolled in the course on a full-time basis, funded by Canada Manpower. Some others continued with their employment and took night courses, while others again quit their jobs rather than take the course (even though taking the course was not mandatory—when the city made a ECD/ECE certificate a requirement for employment in its day cares in 1986, long-time employees were protected by a “grandfather” clause).85

Satellite FDHs and OOSC were two other areas where Medicine Hat lagged behind Edmonton and Calgary for most of the 1970s. In May 1977, the city’s day care advisory committee began a study of the need for OOSC, particularly among the children of lone parents. The city decided to organize OOSC through FDHs, and the first supervisor for this service was hired at the end of 1978. By the end of 1979, Medicine Hat had plans to add ten spaces in day homes for children under two years of age to the thirty spaces for school-aged children.86

All told, Medicine Hat offered a comprehensive package of publicly administered child care services at the end of the 1970s, including day cares, satellite FDHs for both young children and school-aged children, and kindergartens. The movement in Medicine Hat had the good fortune of operating in a small city where it was possible for the city government to keep ahead of commercial interests. Nonetheless, child care advocates deserve full credit for taking advantage of that opportunity and building a unique experiment. Consequently, it came as no surprise that Medicine Hat was one of the municipalities in 1978 that strongly opposed the province’s new method of funding day care with portable subsidies.

Medicine Hat joined with Edmonton to sponsor a resolution at the 1978 annual convention of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association that called for negotiations to ensure that municipalities secured a larger role in the new day care system. The city had no choice but to implement the financial terms of the portable subsidy system on 1 April 1979 since funding for PSS day cares would otherwise be discontinued. Nevertheless, it held off approving the details of its participation until 6 March 1979.87

At the end of the 1970s, all licensed child care in Medicine Hat continued to be run by the municipality, and a concerted effort was underway to upgrade the average level of training of the workers in the municipal day cares. Medicine Hat’s unique approach to day care was a source of considerable civic pride and meant that the city remained committed to its program even after the province abandoned the PSS model in favour of a funding formula that promoted
commercial investment. However, the changes made by the province meant that, beginning in the early 1980s, Medicine Hat’s own services would face competition from commercial operators that would grow over time. The history of the city’s involvement in day care after 1979 is recorded in chapter 8.

Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie

In both Lethbridge and Red Deer, the initial attempts to establish PSS day cares were unsuccessful because of significant community opposition. As described in chapter 3, after Lethbridge proposed a PSS day care in 1969, opponents mobilized to such an extent that the provincial government refused to approve the project. In January 1971, Red Deer City Council voted against the Red Deer Day Care Society’s proposal for a PSS day care despite a favourable recommendation from the alderman who chaired the city’s Social Service Board. Opponents of the PSS day care submitted a petition with 431 signatures and argued that the day care would amount to “an unnecessary tax load” since there were vacancies in lower-cost commercial centres. Rather than give up, though, the society proceeded later that year to open a day care in Parkland Christian Church that was staffed entirely by volunteers. It was designed “to demonstrate the need and feasibility of the project.” This strategy was successful: city council soon reversed its earlier decision and accepted the day care as a PSS project. The Red Deer Day Care was officially opened in January 1972 with a license to care for fifty children.88

Opposition to publicly subsidized day care in Lethbridge, however, proved to be more stubborn, and, as a consequence, a PSS day care did not open there until 1974. Even relatively tiny Grande Prairie (only about one-third the size of Lethbridge) had a PSS day care before then (line 2, table 4.1). The failure to establish a PSS day care in Lethbridge before 1974 was not because of lack of trying. Indeed, in the early 1970s, there were a number of advocates for quality, non-profit day care in Lethbridge. The most prominent was Dr. Barbara Lacey, a pediatrician who was elected as the founding secretary of the AAYC in 1971 and who served a term as the chair of the AAYC in the mid-1970s.89

One of the earliest PSS projects in Lethbridge was a preschool designed to prepare children from disadvantaged backgrounds for school. This project became very well accepted in the city, and in 1973 a second preschool opened. The following year, Lethbridge Preschool Services project opened a third preschool
and quietly expanded its services to include a small day care in the north part of the city, licensed for twenty children. Barbara Lacey said that this approach was taken in order to try to avoid negative community reactions to the day care (Bella and Bozak 1980, 33–36).

Lethbridge finally took some initiative on day care in 1975 when it struck an ad hoc committee to examine the supply and demand for day care in the city and to make “recommendations about the financing of increases in the supply, if it felt such increases were warranted.” Barbara Lacey was one of the seven members of the committee, as was the owner of the Kradle Kooop Day Care Centre.

The committee organized a small door-to-door random survey to estimate the demand for day care. Forty-four of one hundred households reported having children of preschool age. The parents of the children in these forty-four households were asked about their preferences for child care, and their answers were then used to extrapolate the demand for day care in all of Lethbridge. The committee estimated that there was an unmet demand for about five hundred day care spaces over and above the 205 licensed spaces that existed in October 1975. The strong demand for day care in Lethbridge at this time was also evidenced by the licensing of fifty new spaces between July and October 1975, and by “the fact that, for some years, the private operators of daycare centres in Lethbridge have been attempting rather substantial expansion of their operations.”

Not a word of criticism of commercial day care can be found in the ad hoc committee’s report, but the committee did criticize the municipal planning commission and other unnamed municipal departments for obstructing the establishment of commercial day cares in residential neighbourhoods and called for city council to remove the obstructions. Furthermore, the committee argued that in an ideal world, commercial operators could meet all of the unmet demand for day care. It ended up recommending the expansion of the PSS system of child care in Lethbridge only because of the “rigidities” in the way that the provincial and federal governments funded day care.

This argument was as conciliatory toward commercial operators as it could possibly have been, short of abandoning the PSS model for day care entirely. At the time, Lethbridge had only three commercial day cares, so the size of this interest group does not explain the conciliatory character of the report. Rather, it would seem that the influence of commercial operators was magnified by the belief that for public policy to be acceptable, it had to cater to the city’s conservative ethos. That ethos had been demonstrated in the 1971 provincial election when Social Credit candidates won both Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West.
Alberta’s Day Care Controversy

(Chief Electoral Officer 1983, 103), and again in 1974 when community opposition caused city council to remove PSS funding from a birth control centre that had been established in 1972 (Bella and Bozak 1980, 52).

Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, there were signs that Lethbridge’s political ethos was changing. In the 1975 provincial election, both sitting Social Credit members for the Lethbridge constituencies ran for re-election, and both were handily defeated. Furthermore, the percentage of the vote for Social Credit in Lethbridge was relatively low in the 1979 provincial election compared to the party’s percentage in Red Deer and many rural constituencies in southern and central Alberta. Indeed, the percentage of the vote gained by the defeated Social Credit candidate in Lethbridge-West in 1979 (18.5 percent) was far closer to the percentage gained by the Social Credit candidate in Medicine Hat (13.6 percent) than the Social Credit candidate in Red Deer (40.7 percent; Chief Electoral Officer 1983). This certainly calls into question whether by the end of the 1970s, Lethbridge remained Alberta’s most conservative city. As will be described later in this section, civil servants in Red Deer were relatively successful in overcoming the initial opposition to PSS day care led by commercial operators and slowly expanded their involvement in day care, eventually getting approval for the hiring of a day care director in 1979. This suggests, contrary to the argument of Bella and Bozak (1980, 57–58), that municipal civil servants in Lethbridge could have likewise become successful advocates for PSS day care in the 1970s if they had been so inclined. The belief that the city’s conservatism would have squelched such advocacy became, by the later part of the decade, a convenient excuse for inaction.

Lethbridge had been the last of Alberta’s six major cities to support day care through the PSS program and the only one of these cities to never hire a day care director (lines 1 and 2, table 4.1). With the province’s removal of day care from the PSS program, Lethbridge was the first of these cities to end all financial support for preschool day care (line 12, table 4.1). Deficit funding for the two PSS centres in the city was discontinued in April 1979.92 Calgary ended deficit funding on the same date but instituted a new subsidy program for its three municipal centres. Lethbridge did not commit any municipal tax dollars to the care of preschool children after that date, even after it learned that Children’s House would close its day home project because of a lack of finances (Bella and Bozak 1980, 38).

The development of PSS day care in the City of Red Deer followed an entirely different course in the 1970s than in Lethbridge, despite the fact that commercial
operators in each city were able to block the initial attempts to establish PSS day cares. In Red Deer, municipal civil servants were committed to providing publicly subsidized child care as a preventive service, and, as a consequence, the program grew in a step-by-step fashion throughout the decade. In the mid-1970s, there seemed to be little difference between the PSS day care programs available in Red Deer and Lethbridge. Each city had two PSS day cares in May 1977 compared to the five in Medicine Hat and four in Grande Prairie (line 7, table 4.1). Each city also had a single FDH program supported by PSS. Partly as a consequence of the weak development of day care, in 1975–76 Red Deer and Lethbridge expended far less per capita on PSS programs than did Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie. Indeed, even though Red Deer and Medicine Hat had almost the same population in 1976, overall PSS expenditures in Medicine Hat were almost three times those in Red Deer (line 6, table 4.1).

Appearances, however, were deceiving since behind the scenes there was far greater commitment to PSS day care in Red Deer than in Lethbridge. For instance, in 1976 the PSS staff in Red Deer initiated a meeting of the directors of day cares in the central region of the province “to give them an opportunity to talk over common concerns” (Red Deer and District PSS 1976, 13). The regional character of this meeting reflected the fact that Red Deer had eschewed organizing a PSS program just for itself but had instead organized PSS for “Red Deer and District.” Neither Medicine Hat nor Lethbridge took a similar leadership approach in their regions.

In 1977 Red Deer hired a new PSS director, Rick Assinger, who most recently had been the director of ECS for the City of Medicine Hat. Knowing first-hand how successful PSS day care was in Medicine Hat, Assinger prodded his new hometown toward doing more for quality child care. In 1978 the Red Deer Day Care Society and the advisory committee of the day care at Red Deer College proposed that a day care coordinator be hired for the first time in the area. The coordinator’s duties would include helping to plan the expansion of the PSS system in the region, supporting the existing PSS programs, and consulting with commercial day cares. The project was approved and Judy Wong was promoted into the position effective 1 January 1979.93

After the province announced its intention to fund day care through portable subsidies, Red Deer was one of the cities that expressed concern about the provincial proposal and delayed joining the new system.94 However, on 27 November 1978, Red Deer City Council voted to join the provincial system effective 1 April 1979. But the council resolution specified four municipal expectations before
day cares (commercial or not-for-profit) would be approved to enroll subsidized children: (1) parent advisory boards must be established, and they must hold regular meetings; (2) operators must encourage their staff to participate in training programs organized by the city’s PSS department; (3) operators must participate in a day care association; and (4) operators must submit financial reports to the PSS department. The city presented these conditions as steps “to promote the improvement in the quality of day care operations and involve parents more directly in the daycare operations.” One of the new day care coordinator’s first priorities was to get commercial operators to agree to these conditions and enter into formal agreements with the city. By August 1979, three of the five commercial centres in Red Deer, in addition to the two PSS centres, had accepted the conditions and were eligible to receive subsidized children.95

Compared to Medicine Hat, where there were no commercial day cares, and Grande Prairie, where commercial day care did not seem to be particularly viable, in 1979 Red Deer had a number of successful commercial day cares. In this regard, the situation in Red Deer was very much like that in Lethbridge, but the two cities’ responses to the provincial system could not have been more different. Lethbridge agreed to administer the province’s system without any supplementary conditions on centres while Red Deer insisted that day cares agree to supplementary conditions before they were eligible to receive subsidized children. Red Deer’s approach, proven viable when the majority of the city’s commercial centres had signed on by the summer of 1979, became a model of renewed provincial-municipal partnership that encouraged Edmonton to finally join the new system.

By the end of the PSS period, therefore, civil servants and local political leaders were strongly committed to the promotion of quality child care in Red Deer. This commitment carried over into the 1980s and 1990s as the city continued to use municipal tax dollars to improve the quality of care in the Red Deer Day Care and Normandeau Day Care (line 12, table 4.1). Red Deer is evidence that consistent advocacy and organizing by municipal civil servants could gradually diffuse opposition to day care during the 1970s. In achieving this success, Rick Assinger and other municipal bureaucrats had the advantage that Red Deer’s commercial sector was relatively weak compared to that of Calgary and Edmonton, and there were as yet no large capitalist owners in the city. As a consequence, civil servants had the upper hand in framing the debates about day care in Red Deer and in pushing for greater city involvement in quality initiatives.

The last city to be discussed in this section, Grande Prairie, was considerably smaller than the other mid-sized cities discussed to this point. Its population in
1976 was only 18,000 (line 3, table 4.1), and it did not always register on the radar screens of provincial bureaucrats and politicians. Nevertheless, Grande Prairie played a very important role in the history of PSS day care, both because of the relatively high per capita level of PSS spending in the city (line 6, table 4.1) and because Grande Prairie’s civil servants actively promoted the establishment of day cares and FDHS in smaller municipalities throughout northwestern Alberta.

The first PSS day care in Grande Prairie was run by the Grande Prairie Children’s Society out of the basement of a church. It served children between three and five years of age. The centre also organized FDHS to look after children under three years. In the year that this project was established, 1972, Grande Prairie had three commercial day cares. The city’s PSS director, Jean Lowe, reported that there were “negative feelings about the government moving into day care and forcing private people out of business. In order to prevent this negative feeling and forcing private centres out of business (which did not happen) the publicity has been very low-key.”

The new PSS day care in Grande Prairie attracted the attention of some families in the village of Hythe who were interested in better child care. On 1 January 1973, the Grande Prairie Children’s Society opened a small day care in Hythe, which had a mere five hundred residents. Jean Lowe wrote, “I feel that none of us really expected it to work or that there would be such a need in the small community.” But the pilot project was so successful that the day care was continued as its own PSS project; it operated at full capacity of fourteen children for most of the fall of 1973.96

Quality day care in northwestern Alberta received a boost the next year when Grande Prairie Regional College began its early childhood education and development program. Before the end of its second year of operation, the program had satellite classrooms in Spirit River, Slave Lake, and Peace River in addition to its main location in Grande Prairie, and eighty students were enrolled.97

Until 1975, the Grande Prairie and area PSS day cares received budget advances that were unconnected to the number of children served. In order to control costs, Jean Lowe instituted a per diem funding system in 1975. That same year, Grande Prairie hired a day care coordinator, whose duties included helping community groups develop proposals for new day cares, organizing in-service training for staff, and encouraging parental involvement in the centres. In July 1975, a new PSS day care started operating in another nearby village, Beaverlodge.

A fourth PSS day care was established later in 1975. Earlier that year PSS had helped cover the costs of a commercial centre in Grande Prairie, Pat’s Day
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Care, which was in danger of going out of business. Even with this assistance, Pat’s Day Care was unprofitable and PSS chose to discontinue the subsidy. This spurred some parents with children in the day care to pursue the idea of buying the business from the owner and running it as a non-profit society that would qualify for full PSS support. Stepping Stones Day Care started operating in November 1975.

The development of the PSS day care system in the Grande Prairie region was not without internal problems. The day care coordinator position, held by Norma Harper, was terminated in early 1977 at about the same time the Volunteer Services Bureau was closed. A provincial civil servant suggested that the actions were taken because Harper and the director of the Volunteer Services Bureau were “bright and articulate” young women and “seem to have threatened a few of the PSS Board—including the chairman.” If this analysis is correct, then these actions are further evidence of the gendered character of municipal bureaucracies in the 1970s.

The bigger problem, however, was finances. One indication of this problem was a report that the director of Alberta’s Day Care Unit, Catarina Versaevel, wrote in November 1979 on “the various methods municipalities are using to phase-out their deficit method of funding and make the transition to the Family Subsidy method of funding.” She wrote, “We anticipate that Grande Prairie will experience difficulty in phasing out the deficit.” A large reason for this difficulty was that, unique among Alberta’s six major cities, Grande Prairie had taken the initiative to establish PSS day cares in nearby rural centres (Hythe and Beaverlodge). Rural PSS day cares were faced with the dilemma that although their costs were significantly higher than the maximum subsidy provided by the province ($190 for a preschooler), many of their clients did not have the means to pay those extra costs out of their own pockets. The only solution to this dilemma was to cut costs by lowering quality. It appears that the two former PSS day cares in Grande Prairie itself, Awasis and Stepping Stones, also ran into financial difficulty at this time because of an unwillingness to charge parents anything beyond the minimum required by the province.

Grande Prairie, like Red Deer and Medicine Hat, protested the terms of the new provincial system for day care but then joined the new system effective 1 April 1979. Municipal civil servants and politicians, however, remained very committed to quality child care. The city facilitated both the Awasis and Stepping Stones day cares in owning their own properties by providing municipal debentures for which interest did not have to be paid until the principal was retired. Furthermore, small annual grants were made to the day cares to cover the cost of children’s bus...
fares and the use of municipal recreational facilities. More significantly, when Awasis moved to its new location in order to cut costs and no longer had the room to run an FDH program, the city agreed to begin administering that program. The municipal government felt obliged to remain as a direct service provider because its FDH program was the only one in the city that accepted babies and had higher standards than the program operated by Stepping Stones.

The biggest contribution that Grande Prairie made to quality child care at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, however, was an extension of its trail-blazing work in Hythe and Beaverlodge. Many groups and individuals in northwestern Alberta contacted the city for advice on setting up FDHS. Municipal civil servants provided that advice and invited people to come to Grande Prairie for a week to observe how the city ran its own FDH program. Grande Prairie’s FDH program was so well regarded at the time that the province itself utilized Grande Prairie’s standards as a model when it finally developed provincial standards for satellite FDH programs.

Of the three cities discussed in this section, therefore, Grande Prairie was the most innovative in its involvement in child care. Indeed, in the 1970s, no other Alberta municipal government established day cares in neighbouring rural centres (although Red Deer tried to do so) and no other municipal government helped to convert a commercial centre into a community-run PSS centre. With the end of the PSS program, Grande Prairie joined Medicine Hat as the only two of the six major cities that directly administered a satellite FDH program. Overall, while Grande Prairie’s level of spending on and commitment to quality initiatives fell somewhat short of Medicine Hat’s, this small city made an impact on the development of day care in Alberta that went far beyond its size. This demonstrates one of the greatest virtues of the PSS program: it facilitated exciting developments in day care wherever municipal bureaucrats and politicians took the initiative. The next section briefly surveys the establishment of PSS day cares in centres smaller than Grande Prairie.

Smaller Municipalities

In the 1970s, many local governments in Alberta did not use the PSS program to establish a day care. Among the municipalities in this category were the towns of Leduc and Fort Saskatchewan near Edmonton and the town of Airdrie near Calgary. In the case of Airdrie, in 1978 a provincial civil servant reported that the
“mayor and one or two councillors are very much anti-day care.” He concluded, “Day care developments in Airdrie are unlikely to take place soon.” Without doubt, elected officials in some other centres shared this aversion to day care. But even without ideological opposition to publicly subsidized day care, cost to the municipality was a strong deterrent. The PSS program required municipalities to cover 20 percent of the cost of programs, and 20 percent of the cost of a day care was a heavy burden for a municipality with a small tax base.103

The cost issue was documented in a 1975 brief to the provincial government by the Lesser Slave Lake Preventive Social Services Advisory Board. The brief was written “on behalf of small rural-urban municipalities who are finding it financially impossible to provide proper and quality Day Care services as well as continuing the funding of existing [PSS] projects.” The town of High Prairie in northwestern Alberta had entered the PSS program in 1969 and thereafter convinced smaller communities near Lesser Slave Lake (notably, the towns of Slave Lake and Kinuso, as well as three Metis settlements) to undertake preventive services as a district project. The brief noted that to open PSS day cares in Slave Lake and High River, the municipalities would have to increase their contributions to PSS by 140 percent. It went on to assert that “a quality Day Care service is essential to a community” and noted that there is considerable “citizen pressure for Day Care services.” Nevertheless, covering 20 percent of the cost for PSS day care was creating a “grave situation for municipal finances.” It suggested an alternative funding mechanism whereby the province would cover 100 percent of a subsidy up to a particular ceiling, with the municipality covering any subsidy beyond the ceiling.104

In 1975 there were twenty-one PSS day cares outside of Calgary and Edmonton (table 4.2). Of these, thirteen were located in towns and villages (excluding the Hythe day care run by the Grande Prairie and District PSS). By 1977 the number of PSS centres in towns and villages had risen to eighteen (excluding both the Hythe and Beaverlodge day cares). Although PSS day cares could be found in rural areas in all regions, they were definitely over-represented in the northwest (seven of the eighteen centres), in part because Grande Prairie served as a model and resource for developing day cares in small communities in the region. In addition, day cares in the northwest qualified for capital grants (to cover renovations or equipment purchases) from the Edmonton-based Clifford E. Lee Foundation. These grants were not available to day cares south of Red Deer.105

The province stopped accepting proposals for new PSS day cares in March 1978 but honoured commitments to PSS funding that had already been made.
As a result, new PSS day cares were established in Canmore, Coaldale, and Fort McMurray in 1978 and 1979, bringing the total number of PSS day cares in small centres to twenty-one. At this time, two other small centres—Jasper and Beaumont—had publicly supported day cares. Significantly, these latter two day cares were local initiatives (in Jasper by a school board and in Beaumont by a municipal government) independent of the PSS framework. They demonstrated that local governments in small Alberta communities had the option of making licensed day care a funding priority for their communities. It is noteworthy that both of these publicly administered centres continue to operate in 2010 and, at the time of writing, are the only licensed day cares in their respective communities. With a modicum of financial support, the provincial government could have encouraged many more small municipalities across Alberta to open similar day cares. However, as was described in the first part of this chapter, at the end of the 1970s, the provincial government turned its back on special grants for high-quality, not-for-profit day cares in favour of a portable subsidy funding system. This made it much more difficult to establish not-for-profit centres after 1978, especially in small communities where alternative sources of community funding were limited.

As the province moved toward an election in March 1979, it finally looked as if the provincial government and civil servants were listening to the municipalities and advocates who had so strenuously opposed the 1978 reforms to the day care system. Municipalities still had an important role in day care, and the province had seemingly accepted that municipalities’ legitimate role was to promote standards of care that exceeded the province’s licensing standards. This offered the hope that although special provincial funding for the PSS day cares was being phased out, new versions of higher-quality day care would emerge under the guidance of municipal civil servants and politicians. What lay ahead, however, was the sudden and unilateral termination of municipal involvement in the provincial day care system.