

A New World of Advocacy for Children

by Kenneth Jaffe

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The World Forum on Early Care and Education was an unforgettable experience for the 500 participants from more than 40 countries. The opportunity to share ideas, resources, and best practices on hundreds of child care issues; the quality and level of the discussion; and the depth of the knowledge of the participants made for a unique exchange. One of the highlights of the Forum was a remarkable unanimity of spirit and purpose. Nowhere was that spirit more unified than around issues of advocacy for child care.

What started as one of the many stimulating conference dialogues — focusing around advocacy and fundraising — led to a groundswell of enthusiasm and commitment to develop a unified approach to dealing with common issues of child care concerns. From Kenya to Australia and from Malaysia to the United States, common themes of child care need were expressed by conference participants from highly diverse perspectives. Government officials, center directors, child care chain owners, and researchers in early child-

hood realized that they could be helped by the successes and experiences of others in attempting to remedy child care challenges in their own regions or nations. The groups began to work on a strategy to involve the World Forum as an advocacy resource sharing network in the future.

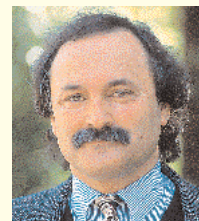
The strategy was then brought to the International Organizing Committee of the World Forum for their concurrence. The committee enthusiastically embraced the idea of an advocacy

exchange fostered by the Forum. The advocacy group saw three issues as having greatest current relevance and needing the highest attention. These issues are all related to the quality, availability, and conditions of child care workers. The three areas chosen for initial attention were:

- Employee wages
- Job status
- Employee training

It was suggested that the role that could be most effectively played by the Forum would be to make use of the *Exchange* web site — with linkages to other web sites — where advocacy approaches, successes, descriptions, and strategies on wages, employment status, and training improvement will be posted so that information can be downloaded for use in countries attempting to develop new strategies. Some of the areas of concern and approaches which were of interest to the advocacy group were the “Cares Bill” model currently enacted in various forms in California and being attempted legislatively on a statewide

Ken Jaffe, MA, JD, is the executive director of the International Child Resource Institute (ICRI), which he founded in 1981. ICRI is a non-profit organization committed to improving the lives of children and families throughout the world through technical assistance and consultation, resource dissemination, and the establishment of model projects. Contact Ken at (510) 644-1000 or e-mail him at ICRIchild@aol.com.



basis. The Cares Bill rewards teachers who stay in the child care field with training payments, bonuses, and potential salary augmentations.

Another California innovation was discussed by the advocacy groups. The passage of the ballot initiative two years ago calling for the addition of 50¢ (United States) per pack cigarette tax led to the development of an entirely new funding stream for programs for young children. The initiative, now operated under the California Families and Children's Commission, was launched by film actor, director, and comedian Rob Reiner as an attempt to secure a steady funding source for new programs for children from birth to five.

The funds, which have now reached more than \$700 million (United States) per year, are allocated 20% to the state commission and 80% to local commissions in the 58 counties in California. Each county commission develops a strategic plan for the expenditure of funds, the ongoing assessment of local needs, and the initiation of a coordinated effort to meet the needs of children from birth through age five..

Through this initiative, the funds in many California counties have already been designated for improving the quality, quantity, affordability, and accessibility of child care services. Several counties have committed as much as two-thirds of their allocation to child care. Advocacy group participants had a keen interest in developing similar efforts in their own regions.

The Scandinavian model for teacher training was also discussed. The approach which calls for an intensive (generally three year) college level education for child care teachers and directors is seen as one of the world's best. The training is practically oriented and, aside from theories, immerses the students in art, music, learning theories, and administration more on a "hands-on basis." The funding for this training is provided through university funding from the national government.

Australians are looking for greater consistency in child care funding and operation after changes caused by labor or conservative governments over the past ten years. They are attempting to influence the current conservative government to make a more secure place for child care in national planning. While the private sector has been asked to take responsibility for child care, few new initiatives to make this possible have been enacted. The Australians are interested in sensible strategies for making the government more aware of the cost and benefit impact of having available, affordable, and accessible child care base.

Child care planners and advocates are also interested in the development of local or national ordinances which encourage or mandate that employers must pay for some of the child care related costs of their expansion into new communities. This is done to "mitigate" the impact on local child care of an influx of new employees to meet employer needs. The Netherlands has

one of the most fully developed models on child care public/private cooperation, whereby employers must develop child care alternatives as they add new employees. This is accomplished through contracting with an outside operator, developing their own child care program, or paying into a municipal fund used to establish new local child care programming. This approach is of great interest to child care providers in Singapore and Malaysia.

These examples of programs and best practices can help to inform and expand the advocacy efforts of child care leaders in their own countries. *An invitation to you:* This fall, when the *Exchange* web site becomes interactive, you can post your own models, best practices, and other useful information to the World Forum Advocacy pages. You can also download that information which can be of use to you in your own efforts to improve wages, expand training opportunities, and improve the status of child care workers in your country or region.

The next World Forum — to be held in Athens, Greece, next April — will review advocacy efforts of this year and decide on the common subject areas for the next year. It is our hope that this effort to share resources and expertise in this worldwide attempt to improve quality care for children and the status and conditions for staff who are critical to every program will have a long-term positive impact on our field.