

The Small Fry

MARGARET T. HAMPEL

MRS. DAVIS HAD two pre-school age children and one school age child to support, when her husband gave up a good job to join the Army. The welfare worker helped her find reliable foster-home care for the 1-year-old. The 3-year-old was placed in an all-day center provided by the community and the Federal Government; her 7-year-old youngster was enrolled in school and in the before-and-after-school center, sponsored jointly by the schools and the Federal Government. The mother got a job in a war plant. She did her shopping in the late afternoon before calling for her children.

This mother, in spite of the difficult problem she had to solve, worked out a fairly good design for living in wartime. She had part-time help in the

home and spent as much of her day as possible with her three children. Her salary was adequate, but not high, and, together with her Government allowance, gave her enough to get along on. She was very happy to keep her children together, and after the war she hoped to return to her home.

The children were healthy, happy youngsters, and the transfer from complete home care for the two younger children seemed to change the family relationships very little. The 3-year-old child and the 7-year-old made speedy, friendly adjustments in the centers for children of working mothers. The baby, too, seemed to accustom himself to the foster-mother and to the sensible kind of affection and care he received—a kind of affection that did not interfere with his intense delight in greeting his mother when she called for him daily.

Many conclude that mothers who work in industry lose interest in their children and become quite willing to leave their complete care to others. This is not necessarily true. Most mothers are deeply concerned and are worried at work unless their children are getting good care. They are eager to return to their children when the shift is over, and a great deal of affection is expressed by both parents and children.

Here is an example of what nursery-school care can mean to working parents. This was a family of three—

The life of the "small fry"—the pre-school youngster—is as surely disrupted by war as the life of the adolescent who takes recourse from parental or community neglect in some form of delinquency or of the youth who today is a high school senior and tomorrow a private in the U. S. Army. In this article Margaret T. Hampel of Ohio University, Athens, discusses some of the effects of war upon the very young. For several months last year Miss Hampel was on leave from Ohio University, working with the program of extended school services of the U. S. Office of Education. In this capacity she visited a number of defense areas and worked with people of schools and communities who were attempting to solve their problems of care of young children.

the mother, father, and a boy 4 years of age. They had been living in a small town but, with the coming of gasoline rationing, had found it difficult to make a living at the filling station which they operated. They decided to move to one of the boom town areas to take work in a war production plant. The population of the town having jumped from 10,000 to 50,000, they found it impossible to get a place to live. They became the tenants of trailer town just outside the city.

Community Planning for Child Care

They were industrious people and attempted to make the small space provided inside and outside the trailer as inviting as possible, but they found it extremely hard to take care of a small child. When they applied for work they were given information about a child-care center for pre-school age children. The parents were asked to pay 50 cents a day or \$3 a week to cover part of the cost of care, cost of the noon meal, and the mid-morning and mid-afternoon milk or orange juice. The center operated with one-half the cost covered by fees and the other half paid by the Federal Government.

The parents were quite concerned about the welfare of the child, and the child-care center seemed to be a solution to supplement the care they could give him at home. They spent a great deal of their spare time with the child, and, while they did not like the make-shift home life, they recognized that life could not be entirely normal during a war. They were thinking of a time when they could build a bungalow back home with the money they were saving.

For their youngster, the day in the

pre-school center began at 5:45 A.M. The children who arrive at this hour rest on cots until 8 A.M. Then it is time for breakfast. Even a 4-year-old, with a little help from the assistant teacher, can take responsibility for dressing, for toileting, for washing his face and hands, and for brushing his teeth. Some eight or ten children eat together at an inviting table. Bowls of oatmeal, milk, and toast are ready for the children. A teacher is nearby at all times to encourage and to help, when help is needed. The children eat with real zest, and laughter and conversation make the breakfast a most happy occasion. Little difficulty is experienced in getting children to eat. After the breakfast they carry their dishes to the serving tables and clean up for the play period.

The morning includes plenty of opportunity for individual and group play, both indoor and outdoor. Other children, whose mothers are not on the early shift, arrive at 8 or 9 o'clock. They have breakfast at home and join the early-comers in time for the regular morning health inspection.

Mid-morning brings cod liver oil, milk, or orange juice. More play follows. At noon an appetizing lunch is served. The children help in getting tables ready and in serving food. Toileting and washing-up routines follow the noon lunch. During a long rest period most of the children sleep. Mothers or fathers, big brothers and sisters, call for the children late in the afternoon. When necessary because of a parent's working schedule, supper is served to the children. Every effort is made to plan the day so that the parent or parents will find it possible to spend some time with the child.

Meeting the needs of families whose lives have been disrupted by war calls for a broadened concept of community planning. The winning of the war is a necessity; so our concern for the children must take into consideration the production of war goods. As more men go into service, women are being called upon in increasing numbers to provide the skill and speed to meet war production schedules. It is the policy of the War Manpower Commission in recruiting woman-power to discourage the employment of women with young children, but there are many instances when it becomes necessary for mothers with pre-school and school age children to work.

A few communities are ready for the challenge and are going to work upon their problems. The community-conscious school assumes the leadership, or an active welfare agency steps in to fill the gap. County-wide planning includes representation of many groups—labor, industry, education, welfare, religious groups, child protection groups, and community clubs. A very thrilling adventure in community planning is the result.

Community or county-wide war-service centers are opened where war-workers may get information and help on child care, marketing, housing, and other needs. These centers are located in a readily accessible spot and are operated by volunteer service and by the paid leadership of welfare or education groups. Where an over-all community plan establishes war need, the community applies for Federal aid to supply 50 per cent of the cost of operation of pre-school centers and before-and-after-school and summer-vacation

centers for children of working mothers. Many schools are already operating such centers. In communities where war needs are not so pressing, there should be a similar concern for the understanding of children and for the services that should be provided.

Need for Perspective in Planning Education for Young People

The problems we have to solve relative to children in wartime should not be questions limited to a nation at war, but should take into account society's concern for its children at all times. Some of us in our haste to do something about the problems which seem so pressing fail to consider long-term values. In meeting the war emergency, we should not sacrifice the values to which we would hold in normal times. It will be harder to maintain these values during the stress of war, and at times we may want to give up the struggle. But it will be necessary for us to mobilize more resources and to discover new ways to solve our problems in order to combat the deterrent forces of war. No matter how difficult the job, we cannot afford to neglect it.

It is highly possible that schools in the postwar world will include extended school services as a recognized part of the total planning to meet the needs of children in an industrial democracy. The emphasis would be on a kind of education from childhood to adulthood that would enrich living and contribute to an improving family and community life. Just what that design for family life in a postwar world will be will depend to some extent upon our present intelligence and insight in planning.

The planning carried out in a community-wide way might mean that a community would take stock of the things that are happening to its children and would mobilize all of its resources, its leadership, and would provide for its children a kind of growing environment that has never before been realized. The "small fry" would be included in health and nutrition services to mothers and children, in recreation facilities, in pre-school centers, and in a functional education for primary grades.

*Education for Young Children
Can Enrich Family Life*

Industrial society has imposed its demands upon an American family not too aware of the things that are happening to it. Fears and traditions block constructive action. Nothing that has happened in good nursery schools in the United States would lead us to conclude

that the taking of the pre-school age child out of the home for the day would mean the breakdown of the American family and the building up of a way of life we do not admire.

On the contrary, good nursery schools, provided for the very few children, have been with us long enough to help us see that the mother can plan a much better home life when the right kind of care is given outside the home for part of the day or for the entire day, depending upon the extent of need in the home. It is not merely an escape or a way out of a humdrum life for the mother but may be the way to a greatly enriched life for her and for the members of her family. Certainly, it is a step toward achieving a better kind of growing for the child in a society that has at times all but crowded out a consideration of wholesome living for the "small fry."



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