

Would county child care stem employment problems?

By Kathy Parrish staff writer

Getting to work on time can be a hassle when you have to dress, feed and drop kids at a baby-sitter's first.

And sometimes employees need to sneak out just a little early to pick up a youngster from day camp.

To see just how much child care affects employment, Oakland County surveyed its workers and managers. The results will be used to decide whether there is a need for a day-care center in the county complex.

"In order for a day-care center to be successful and pay for itself, people would have to use it," explained Vince Luzi, assistant director of personnel.

A SURVEY studying the need for an employee day-care center was proposed last spring by Commissioner Betty Fortino.

The Pontiac Democrat cited the rising number of two-income families and single-

Managers reported difficulties with employees that ranged from absenteeism, late arrival and early departure to children constantly on the phone to a parent.

parent households and an "acute need for quality day care." She noted other companies and governmental units provide child care and that the service has been requested by Oakland County employees.

Adding that a center would reduce employee absenteeism, her resolution stipulated that it be provided at no cost to taxpayers.

TO DETERMINE the need for a day-care center or child-care information, the county personnel office did two surveys.

One, aimed at managers, asked about the impact of child-care problems on productivity and attendance. Fifty-three of 78 county managers responded to the questionnaire. While 15 managers have not had problems with employees because of child care, 32 have. The difficulties ranged from absenteeism, late arrival and early departure to children constantly on the phone to a parent.

Most of those responding said child-care problems are indeed present and they have not had recruiting problems because the Pontiac complex does not offer child care.

Asked which services would most help resolve the problems, 31 put a child-care in-

formation service at the top of the list. Twenty-seven believe an on-site child-care facility would be most helpful and 18 prefer an off-site facility.

THE OTHER SURVEY went out with paychecks to 3,300 employees, including managers. Of 111 people (7.6 percent) who answered questions about their day-care needs, 190 are females (78 percent) and 61 are males (24 percent).

Two hundred twenty have children requiring day care. Eighty-one anticipate new child-care needs within one to three years. Weekly child-care expenses average \$53. Most (211 people) said an on-site facility would best meet their needs. Eighty-five said an off-site facility would be best and 85 would like to see child-care information services.

One hundred three said they have child-care problems, including travel time, cost, quality care, hours of operation and other concerns like the special needs of a child. Their work is also affected by day-care problems. While 18 percent said child care doesn't impact their work, 40 percent occasionally arrive late or leave early, 17 percent think it lowers the quality or quantity of their work, 32 percent have some absences and 4 percent report other problems.

PRESENTING THE findings to the Board of Commissioners' personnel committee, Luzi made no recommendations. But he did question whether the response, indicated wide interest in a center.

"I haven't seen a lot of requests for day care," he said. "There seems to be a lot of good-quality day care in Oakland County."

Luzi estimates start-up costs for a county day-care center would run \$40,000-\$200,000. Yearly operating costs would run \$2,200-\$6,000 per child.

OCC awarded energy funds

Oakland Community College has been awarded \$70,000 in state funds for special projects in Alternate Energies Technology.

In addition to finding ways to reduce utility bills, interested members of the community will be able to learn how to build an energy efficient solar greenhouse, design solar collectors, and turn roof into a solar attic.

A ground breaking ceremony and tour of the Auburn Hills Energy Technology Lab will be held at 1 p.m. Aug. 27. Information for homeowners, tradesmen, and individuals seeking employment will be available. All interested persons are invited to attend.

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