On-Site Child Care

Botsford Hospital's day care program a benefit for parent employees

By Casey Hans
staff writer

While larger companies address the child care issue by offering alternative benefit programs and referral services for employees, Botsford General Hospital is one of a few companies investing in on-site child care.

It's the "pet project" of Botsford administrator Steven Faine, who has followed the program from its inception to its operation on the hospital grounds during the past 1½ years.

The osteopathic hospital is on Grand River in Farmington Hills, on the borders of Livonia and Redford Township.

"When it comes to kids, everybody likes to get involved," Faine said. "The children seem to be a leveling influence. They help us from taking life too seriously."

With a majority of the hospital's 1,300 employees being women, and day care considered a women's issue, the hospital has taken a great interest in the program.

"All you read about is day care," he said. "How do you get them (women) back into the workplace? The obvious answer is to help them with day care."

THE HOSPITAL charges a set fee and absorbs additional costs of more than $1,000 per child, per year as an employee benefit.

Whether a parent works as a doctor, nurse or member of the hospital's support staff, when they leave their child at the center they all get the same parental benefit, Faine said.

"It's an equalizer for all jobs," he added. "They're all equal when they're parents."

On-Site Child Care is the management company that runs the center for Botsford and employs co-directors Sally Fee and Janet Munson. Since the center can only house 36 youngsters, including infants, Fee and Munson also act as referral agents for the remainder of the hospital employees.

Whether it's questions on "potty training," or discipline, all employees have access to information.

"We did make the commitment we wanted to be the highest quality program available," Faine said.

The referral services and other programs offered through the child care center are a "positive benefit to people who use it. It's the kind of thing I think the parents like."

The Botsford program was only an idea several years ago, when Faine began a feasibility study for the center. The hospital spent more than $200,000 to build the center and opened it in June 1986 with a full roster and a waiting list.

WHERE THE program apparently has not helped is in the hospital's recruitment of nurses — a situation that is reaching crisis proportions for hospitals across the country.

Where it does help, even with nurses, is in keeping employees on the job once they are hired, Faine said.

While the program was in its infancy, Faine said the staff learned the importance of good communication with parents. They now hold quarterly parent meetings, and an appointed Parent Advisory Board helps to make policy decisions relating to the center.

In its 1½ years in existence, the day care center has become "part of the hospital culture," Faine said.

Maintenance workers recently installed a bird feeder and have built a storage shed. Employees have helped establish a garden at the center. Hospital dieticians pay special attention to the youngsters.

Employee/parents can visit their children during mealtime or on other breaks. These same parents are not as concerned about their child, knowing he is on-site and close by.

"Day care seems to a viable concern today," Faine added. "The child is important." The Botsford day care center "gives parents some control. They can participate."

photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Peggy Smith, care giver, feeds James Falzon, 10 months, while rocking back and forth in a rocking chair.

Sally Fee, director of the child care facility at Botsford Hospital, listens to a story with Brett Richardson, 3.

Senators sponsor bill for better child care

'We should not allow America to continue to lag behind virtually every other industrialized nation in providing a comprehensive child care system.'

— Donald Riegle, D-Michigan

By Neal Haldane
staff writer

Parental leave is only one of the possible solutions elected officials are pursuing to resolve child care problems.

Last month, 20 U.S. senators, including Donald Riegle, D-Michigan, co-sponsored the Act for Better Child Care.

"We should not allow America to continue to lag behind virtually every other industrialized nation in providing a comprehensive child care system," said Riegle who has introduced several other child care bills.

In the bill's first year, $2.5 billion in federal money would be allocated with a requirement that states provide a 20 percent match.

Michigan would receive $71.7 million in the first year if the legislation is approved as proposed.

The ABC bill, as it is known, centers on two areas.

The first is to provide grant money to the states to help broaden the number and variety of child care services and to assist low-income families with child care costs.

The bill also aims to increase the quality of child care for all residents by improving child care standards and enforcement and by providing technical assistance, resources and referral programs.

In addition, the legislation requires an overall child care plan be developed to meet the needs of infant, preschool and school-age children.

"WHILE I am deeply concerned about the size of the federal budget deficit, we must reorder current budget priorities to place the care and education of our children in the position they deserve," Riegle said.

To help stretch federal money, Riegle has introduced legislation designed to encourage private, for-profit businesses to join with non-profit organizations to improve and increase child care services.

Grants will be provided to non-profit groups to create a fund. However, at least 50 percent of the money in that fund must come from for-profit firms.

Public money available will be reduced to 40 percent and 25 percent respectively in the second and third years.

This bill is awaiting action by the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

IN MICHIGAN, state Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, is looking at alternatives to legislation.

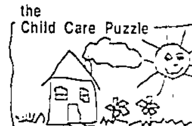
"I personally believe anything people can do on their own without being told what to do is the way to go," Bankes said.

"I support parental leave in concept but unless we can work it out where small business doesn't get hurt we won't move forward."

So Bankes has spent the last few months collecting information about child care and how employers treat child care.

In January, Bankes said she will publish a book on her findings.

"It's a business how-to book," she said. "It's how they can provide child care for employees at no additional cost."



Thursday
Professional day care centers and education respond to demand.

Monday, Dec. 21
Choosing home over career; and the effects of non-parental care on children.

Thursday, Dec. 21
Some suggestions on how to resolve the child care puzzle.

Day care at workplace: fringe benefit of 1990's?

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"I definitely think the trend is in that direction — it's just a matter of time," said Richard Studley, a vice president for the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, which represents 7,500 companies throughout the state. "I think the trend is across the board. There are obviously more well-established programs in the larger companies.

"The biggest barrier to small companies is not a lack of desire, but a limited ability to pay (for benefits)."

Studley said market conditions dictate the needs for employee benefits such as child care. His organization is fighting attempts to bring the day care issue into the legislative arena. "It is basically an economic decision that has to be decided by workers and employers," he added.

WHETHER VOLUNTARY or legislated, Harvard economist David Bloom contends child care will become the "fringe benefit of the 1990s" because there will be fewer young people, and companies will become more competitive in recruiting.

Some companies already offer day care benefits to enhance their marketability, recruiting efforts and to help employees be more productive. Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills opened a day care facility in 1986 for its employees. The hospital, at Grand River and Eight Mile, is only one of about 150 employers nationally to host an on-site location, according to national statistics.

Hospital administrator Steven Faine, calls the concept "one-stop shopping" for employees, who can drive to work and leave their children at the facility located at the rear of the hospital parking lot.

"We view it not only as a benefit, but an attraction — a way of retaining and recruiting employees," he said.

Larger companies offer child care as part of a cafeteria-style benefits package, allowing employees to select what type of benefits they want at the same price to the employer, according to Carol Quarterman, executive director of the Wayne County 4-C organization, an educational and support group for families and referral agency for child care.

"We're seeing companies are slowly coming to recognize that day care . . . is good for the well-being, productivity and attendance of their employees," she said.

Large companies such as IBM, Pitney Bowes, Tandy Computers, AAA of Michigan and McDonald's use Wayne County 4-C as a resource and referral agency.

In January, 4-C will begin similar programs for Digital, Rolm and American Express. The organization keeps an up-to-date list for employees of these companies, and the companies maintain a dedicated phone line just for day care referral.

The 4-C employees give these workers three viable day care choices, which parents are encouraged to visit before making a selection.

Childrens World, a Colorado-based national child care center group, offers corporations yet a different option — a business program where employees can use any of their 15 facilities at a discounted rate. The more employees use the program, the larger the discount to the company. Childrens World has centers in Redford Township, Livonia and Farmington Hills. Their regional office is in Farmington.

This type of a program addresses a corporate concern today in developing on-site day care programs — the issues of liability and licensing.

Corporations face potential liability issues and increased insurance costs, Studley said. In many cases, they must also follow guidelines set by the state under the Child Care Organization Act, according to Jacqueline Wood of the Division of Child/Day Care Licensing of the Michigan Department of Social Services.

Unless a corporation can guarantee that "all parents can be immediately available at all times," the company's facility must be licensed with the state. There are currently more than 2,600 child care facilities of all types in Michigan, she added.

Maternity leave issue debated

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The bill that has drawn the most co-sponsors is called the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1987.

The House Education and Labor Commitee recently approved a scaled-back version of the original bill that will now go to the full House.

COMPANIES WITH at least 50 employees would have to offer up to 10 weeks of unpaid leave over a two-year period to workers with a newborn, newly adopted or seriously ill child, or parent, if the legislation is approved.

An estimated 56 percent of the private workforce is employed by firms with more than 50 employees.

As originally proposed, the House bill and a similar Senate bill, would have required firms that have 15 or more employees to grant family leave for specified periods.

It is estimated that 78 percent of all private employees work in firms with 15 or more people.

The original legislation would have required 18 weeks of parental leave during a two-year period.

The law also would provide protection of employment and benefit rights during and after such leaves.

A family leave bill was approved by the House Education and Labor Committee in the last Congress but it was not considered on the House floor.

IF A parental leave bill is approved, Studley from the Michigan chamber would prefer to see a federal law.

"We don't favor government regulation at the state or national level but this would sure make more sense at the federal level," he said.

That way, Michigan firms would not be singled out with another burden. Every state would have to comply with the regulation, he said.

At the state level, legislation has been proposed that would require all employers of two or more workers to provide up to 180 days of parental leave — 60 paid, 120 unpaid.

The bill also requires that once the parental leave expires, the employer must restore the employee to his or her former status or an equivalent position.

Leave would be given for the birth of a child, adoption and care of a child, or for attending to a dependent who is seriously ill.

The House Labor Committee is studying the proposal with action expected after the new year.