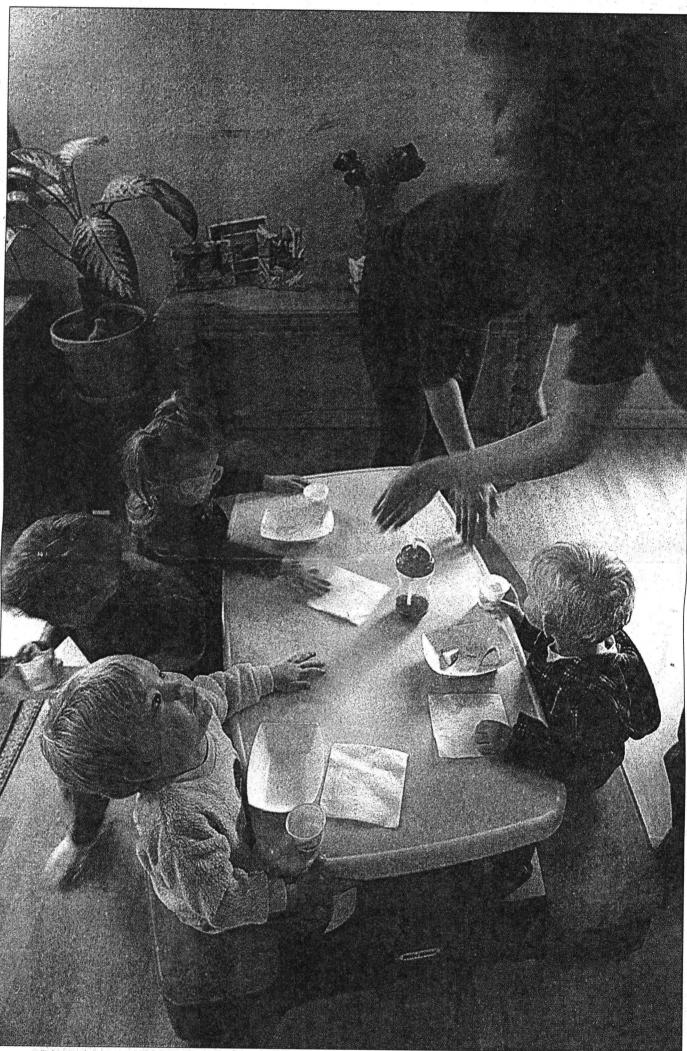
## Child-care crusade

With many 2-income families, parents need more help with kids



By MICHAEL DE GIVE

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Drop off the kids, go to work. Pick up the kids, go home.

The routine is played out by thousands of Santa Cruz County parents every day. In one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, child care isn't a luxury for most local parents — it's one of the basics for economic survival.

"We would have to move some-

where else without it," said Erica Dawson, a mother of two in Boulder Creek.

One study found that 60 percent of parents in the county couldn't earn a living if they didn't have a place to leave their children.

The lesson, say child-care advocates, is that the \$35.5 million childcare industry is an indispensable piece of the county's economic machine — and that it should have more clout with government decision makers. "If we don't have a good-quality child-care system, then we can't get people to work," said Bayla Greenspoon, a child-care development analyst with the county Office of Education.

At a forum in June, Greenspoon and David Foster, her associate at the county Office of Education's Child Development Resource Center, hope to persuade community planners to include child care along with transportation, housing and

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Marla Nix tends to her charges at the La Madrona Day Care Center.

## **Child care**

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employment in their long-range plans.

One proposal is to tie child care to housing. Foster will ask governments to encourage developers to create space for child care when they build new neighborhoods.

"We're trying to look at the idea that child care is part of good, sustainable

planning," Foster said.

With little buildable land left in the county, most new developments couldn't support an entire child-care center, Foster said. But with some modifications — a larger living room, a fencedin yard, a modified floor plan — a house in each new neighborhood could be made into a home-based child-care center, he said.

Foster, who wrote a 14-page pamphlet called "Making Room for Children," is finding support in some government quarters. The city of Watsonville recently sent the pamphlets out to developers bidding on a local housing project, he said.

Other suggestions are to streamline the permit process for child-care centers and ease some ordinances, such as those requiring covered parking structures, for home-based providers, Greenspoon said.

With a \$490,000 grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Child Development Resource Center has joined four other local groups to raise awareness about the importance of child care to the economy and address problems that make it scarce. The consortium is called ChildCare Ventures.

One member of the consortium, the Central Coast Small Business Development Center, has begun a series of workshops to help child-care owners learn how to run their business profitably and efficiently.

Many child-care providers see themselves as nurturers, not businesspeople, and are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with how to run a business, said Teresa Thomae, director of the Small Business Development Center at Cabrillo College.

"I once asked for a show of hands at a workshop, and none of them saw themselves as a business owner," Thomae said. "We start with baby steps. We literally teach people how to reconcile a checkbook."

Hannah Balliet, owner of LaMadrona Day School, says she's begun to think more as a business person since taking several of the workshop, including one on taxes she says saved her money.

Some of those savings may go toward renovating her home-based child care center, she said.

Other workshops cover tax tips, marketing, developing financial literacy and setting up and operating successful home-based child-care businesses.

Santa Cruz Community Credit Union, another ChildCare Ventures member, provides 3 percent loans of up to \$15,000 to licensed child-care providers that meet certain income criteria. The loans can be used for expansions and renovations to child-care centers or homebased providers.

ChildCare Ventures, which also includes El Pajaro Community Development Corp. and the Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency, is also forming partnerships with businesses that help child-care providers. Community printers donates unused paper to local child-care centers. Cruzio The Internet Store offers discounts and free training for Internet services to child-care centers.

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