

# Living

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## Time running out for library



Diane Varni

Child Development Resource Center staff member Toni Nagle, left, and Studio manager Laine Berning work on inventory.

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STAFF WRITER

FOR 14 YEARS, the Studio, a lending library of books, toys and educational materials, has been like a wise and helpful friend to local child-care workers, teachers, parents and children. Thousands of local residents have checked out everything from musical instruments to curriculum kits — all intended to give children and their parents a richer life.

But rich the Studio isn't, and hasn't been for several years. The Studio, behind Sesnon House at Cabrillo College, started as a CETA federally funded project operated cooperatively by the Cabrillo College Early Childhood Education program, the County of Santa Cruz and the County Office of Education. In its heyday in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Studio was a thriving center for early childhood education, support and socialization. It was open five days a week, including Saturday.

Unfortunately, the Studio has never been mandated by the federal, state or local government. It's one of those agency extras that are prime candidates to become casualties during budget time. Through the years, money to support the Studio has dwindled. So have the hours of operation and the ability to afford new materials.

The next step is likely to be the closure of the Studio, say Marcia Meyer, director of the Child Development Resource Center for the County Office of Education, and Laine Berning, Studio manager.

The Studio has been closed for the past month for inventory, and will reopen Aug. 1. Hours are now 2:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays. By next year at this time, it will probably be eliminated. The County Office of Education CDRC advisory board is considering that option today, and Meyer said she is fairly certain they will go along with the staff recommendation to close the Studio at the end of the fiscal year.

"It is really a fiscal question — you know, dollars," Meyer said. "We can't provide the quality of service we used to. At this point in time, we must do prioritizing."

Priority One for the 1990s seems to be the Childcare Switchboard, a program required by the state. The switchboard refers parents to child-care services based on individual need. Switchboard telephones, says Meyer, have been ringing incessantly for years and the calls appear to be on the increase.

"The need for a child-care referral (service) has increased astronomically," Meyer said. "In the early 1980s we would have about 2,500 calls a year. Last

year we had 5,800."

Staff members had to come from somewhere, Meyer said. Often, it was from the Studio.

"It's been a gradual process of reduction (for the Studio)," said Berning, who has worked at the Studio for a year.

Membership has gone from more than 400 to less than 200 in the last few years, she said. The drop, she said, is because the Studio is open fewer hours and people simply don't have the opportunity to use the service.

"People are either too busy or too tired," Meyer said.

Another factor, Berning said, is that parents today want to own child-rearing materials. With so many stepfamilies, it's also important for children to have their own toys. They're already sharing enough, she said.

"Our materials aren't as new as they used to be," she added. "We don't have enough money to keep that up. And in the 1980s, people really wanted shiny, new things."

Both women say the Studio will be a tremendous loss. The likelihood of establishing another one is financially remote.

The Studio is a big, bright room with books, toys, games, playground equipment and educational materials on shelves that nearly touch the ceiling. It's an inviting room that is well-stocked with things to help

parents and interest children. It's also a room that Cabrillo College wants for its ever-expanding classroom needs. Since its opening, the Studio has stayed on the campus rent free.

Part of the inventory, said Berning, will be taken to the County Office of Education building on Bay Avenue in Capitola. The rest will probably go to agencies who have the same kind of funding that was used to buy the materials, she added.

"The saddest loss is going to be the books," Berning said.

"It's definitely a loss," said Meyer, "The issue isn't the value of the service, it's money."

Until June 30, the Studio will continue to offer materials to local residents. The enrollment fee is \$15, which entitles members to check out a total of 10 items — five books, three toys, puzzles or musical instruments, one large toy or piece of play equipment and one audio tape — per month. There are different rates for child-care providers and teachers, who can choose from a variety of educational materials and curriculum kits. Sign up information is available by calling 476-0349 Wednesdays or 662-0122, ext. 284.

"There will be no other agency to take the Studio's place," Berning said. "It's going to be gone. And it's kind of going out with a whimper."