

Day-Care Opening Coming Soon

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Last March, after several more heated battles, the \$60,000 grant to construct and launch the center was awarded.

Aldermen agreed to one other crucial request. They would rent the 3,200-foot space to the center's directors for \$500 a month the first year, and \$800 a month after that. Everyone agrees the rent reflects a sizable price break.

"The city is giving us a very good break in the rent," Driscoll said. "The city is playing an important role here, a very important role."

Driscoll has appointed a board of directors that includes Nick Wiley, leasing agent for Burlington Square Mall; Rick Whittlesey, assistant city attorney; and Fran Toomey, a member of the Council on Children and Families of Chittenden County.

Susan Kuntz, a former evaluation specialist for the Vermont Education Department, was hired as director two weeks ago. She will be paid \$15,000 a year, placing her at the top end of the pay scale for day-care directors, Driscoll said.

All of the \$60,000 grant, however, is being sunk into construction, and at this point the board has no start-up funds for the day care. Kuntz is working part time through the mayor's youth office as she attempts to raise the \$5,000 the board estimates it needs to open the center.

Aside from the block grant, low-rent and in-kind services the city is offering, Burlington is not subsidizing the day-care center and never will, Sanders said. "At this point, our commitment to the center has been fulfilled," he said.

Driscoll said the center will generate enough revenue through fund-raisers, private grants and tuition fees to finance its operation. Should the Children's Place start to falter, the city will be under no obligation to bail it out, she said. But such a question, she added emphatically, is moot.

"The center is not going to fail. There's just no way it will fail," she said. "There is a possibility that all our dreams won't come true. But there's no possibility that it will fail."

Day-care centers, some professionals have said,

traditionally teeter on the financial brink. "The overhead is tremendous," said Donna Little, owner of ABC Day Care Center, the state's largest. It is a labor-intensive business with numerous licensing regulations that must be met, she said.

Infant day care, which many centers do not provide, costs even more because the state requires one day-care provider for every three infants. As the children grow older, the ratio widens.

The day-care center at the Visiting Nurse Association is one of the few Burlington centers that accepts infants. In order to cover that expense, it charges \$75 to \$85 per child weekly, one of the highest rates in town, Nelligan said.

"We're in a position where we're faced with charging the higher end of the scale in cost, and faced with paying care-givers a pretty low wage," Nelligan said.

"That's another reason I'm worried about the Memorial Auditorium day-care, because they're going to have infants," added Danielczyk of the Trinity College day-care center. The center there has been able to maintain lower rates because it does not provide infant care and because it receives a subsidy from the college, she said.

"If we didn't have that subsidy from the college, we couldn't do it," Danielczyk said.

But most day-care providers agree additional day care is needed desperately, especially for the infants and toddlers, Nelligan said. The Visiting Nurse Association receives about 20 calls a week from parents of young children seeking day care. "We have a tremendous waiting list," she said.

It is that need, plus community support, that Driscoll is banking on, she said.

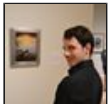
"Everybody is in agreement that there's a need for more child care," Driscoll said. "Different places have told us there are long waiting lists."

Driscoll said the board will save money constructing the center by recruiting volunteer help and will sustain the day care through citywide fund-raising drives. She also plans to turn to employers, who she hopes will buy slots in the center for their employees and contribute money.

"I have confidence in the people of Burlington," she said. "I know it's not logical, but they've proven themselves time and again."

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