

# Penn State child care is in need of reform

by Lyndsay James

Penn State University's 2004 plan to demolish the Child Development Laboratory (CDL) and consolidate its child care functions with the Bennett Family Center (BFC) will have impacts on the faculty, staff, students and their children. Parents are concerned about availability, costs and consistency in staffing and worry that the plan will result in a decline in quality.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredits programs that meet high quality requirements and has accredited CDL since 1995 and the Bennett Center since 2001.

According to Penn State faculty member Loraine Flaherty, "The BFC is currently at the NAEYC minimum of 35 square feet of usable space per child; the addition of more children will lead to loss of NAEYC accreditation...[and] the plan will result in a decline in quantity of high-quality, on-campus care by as much as 32 percent."

Flaherty said that quality child care requires resources including space and funds for better-compensated staff with less turnover, more unity and a philosophical

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base.

"The level of quality will decrease if the new center is not a lab school with ... support and resources. A supportive administration is key," she said.

"The greatest challenge [for parents] is access to the centers," said Barbara Schaefer, a Penn State faculty member with children enrolled in the day care system. "There are so many students and faculty members that as the numbers keep expanding, the number of slots is contracting."

Although each CDL child is guaranteed a spot in the Bennett Center, there will be 56 fewer child care slots when the building is demolished.

A letter from the Executive Committee of the Bennett Family Center Parent-Teacher Organization to PSU president Graham Spanier states that the "BFC-CDL waiting list for high-quality care is currently at 600 children—more than three times the com-

bined capacity of both centers and often translates to a 2-3 years wait—with the largest demand for infant and toddler slots."

"With the loss of CDL, there will only be 12 infant slots on central campus," said Flaherty. The letter explains that there are 32,691 university faculty, staff and graduate students who may need those 12 slots.

The destruction of the CDL building will disrupt its seasoned staff.

"Consistency for children is most important in relation to quality of child care programs," said Wendy Whitesell, the director of the Bennett Center.

She said that many staff members have already left the facilities but the staff has been fairly consistent for the past few months.

Penn State staff member Jennifer Norton explained that because of the cost, some community members do not even consider Penn State's child care facilities.



Photo by Gillian Caruso

Jennifer Norton, has had children enrolled at the University Childcare facilities, and worries about the decline in quality care.

Linda Pierce, of the Office of Human Resources, explained that some child care costs are subsidized for students, but not for faculty or staff.

One factor that the entire community agrees upon, said Norton, is that "the university should recognize child care as a priority, and build on it."

# IHC welcomes international students with picnic

by Rozina Gilani

The International Friendship Program held an annual Welcome Picnic on Sept. 4, 2005, providing local citizens and international students with an opportunity to befriend international residents new to the community. The hosts of the event, along with host families, bestowed guests with a personal link to Centre County, its unique culture, its many places of interest and its hospitality.

International Hospitality Council's (IHC) International Friendship Program was established in the 1970s to offer support and friendship to international newcomers both on campus and in the community, and to provide cultural exchange.

"Every time we make a new friend, it seems like our own world gets a lot bigger. And when that friend is an international friend, it's like our personal [sphere] gets much, much bigger and the physical world gets much smaller," said Merrill David, executive director of IHC, as she welcomed

guests to the picnic.

When Jorge Elizondo moved from Costa Rica to Pennsylvania, he expected much adaptation on his part, as well as a culture shock. Similarly, when Aisha Al-Harathi moved from Oman to Pennsylvania, it was obvious that she would miss her family terribly. Both Elizondo and Al-Harathi, graduate students at Penn State, received a little more than they expected from their move to the United States when they encountered the IHC.

Elizondo has been a participant in the program for the past year. He believes that the IHC helped create a feeling of a new home away from home. He remains extremely appreciative of his host family and their efforts to help him adjust to the new environment.

"They took care of me; they asked me if I needed something, they helped me find mattresses, beds, and kitchen utensils ... the IHC helped me as well as my family adjust," Elizondo said, describing when his

family joined him in State College.

Looking back at the past two years with the Friendship Program, Al-Harathi discovered that IHC helped the international students integrate into the American community and meet other people, an exposure that they might not have had otherwise.

Al-Harathi also said that she has found herself a wonderful host family that "has been inviting me to Thanksgiving and every international gathering."

Furthermore, international students and residents are not the only people benefiting from the program.

Carolyn Bellanti, Al-Harathi's host 'mother,' said, "We are the ones who benefit. You know, we meet these wonderful people, the cream of the crop from their countries ... We really get a lot more out of it [the Friendship Program] than we give."

Bellanti also notes that IHC still has room for growth.

"We are trying to change the perception that we are just a university program

because there are a lot of permanent immigrants who need the same level of outreach, and as a group we are trying to be that as well," she said.

While there is more in store for the International Hospitality Council, including a new name to be announced in the near future, the impact on the new members of the Central Pennsylvanian community is very apparent.

When asked about his experience and success of the program, Elizondo said, "With this program, I think everything is perfect."

## For more information

**New to the area and still learning your way around a new country?**

Find out more about the International Hospitality Council at [www.international.psu.edu/IHC](http://www.international.psu.edu/IHC).