

SOME of many children who get to enjoy the futuristic space theme at Freedom Station Day Care in Bellaire (left and right). The center's staff helped promote PRS initiatives such as the Young at Heart program, which matches older citizens with children in child care.

Child Care Licensing

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, there has been talk across the nation about a “quiet crisis” concerning the healthy development and well-being of young children and their families. A part of this issue involves the increasing demand for quality child care, which has been caused by the rise in the number of single-parent families and families in which both spouses work.

Roughly 17.8 percent of Texas’s more than 4.2 million children age birth to 13 years old are in some kind of out-of-home care provided by day-care centers, kindergartens and nursery schools, drop-in care centers, registered family homes, and group day-care homes.

The agency’s Licensing program is responsible for protecting the health, safety, and well-being of Texas children who reside in or attend child-care facilities. The program also regulates

child-care administrators, foster homes, halfway houses, child-placing agencies, and maternity homes.

One of the most significant changes to the program in Fiscal Year 1997 was the adoption of new minimum standards for day-care centers, effective Sept. 1, 1997. The biggest impact to day-care centers is a requirement for smaller numbers of infants per caregiver, smaller group sizes, and more space for infants. The regulations, approved by the agency’s Board, were based on a consensus among PRS, the Texas Licensed Child Care Association, and the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children. They were designed by child-care providers, parents, lawyers, doctors, and experts in fields such as child development, fire, safety, and sanitation.

Part of the agency’s role is to help parents understand the child-care choices available to them. In addition to more traditional approaches, such as

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brochures, information booths, and community events, the agency created a searchable database of all available licensed and registered child care through the agency's web site (<http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us>) during Fiscal Year 1997. The agency also added information to the web site about different choices in child-care, as well as minimum standards of each category of licensed and registered child care.

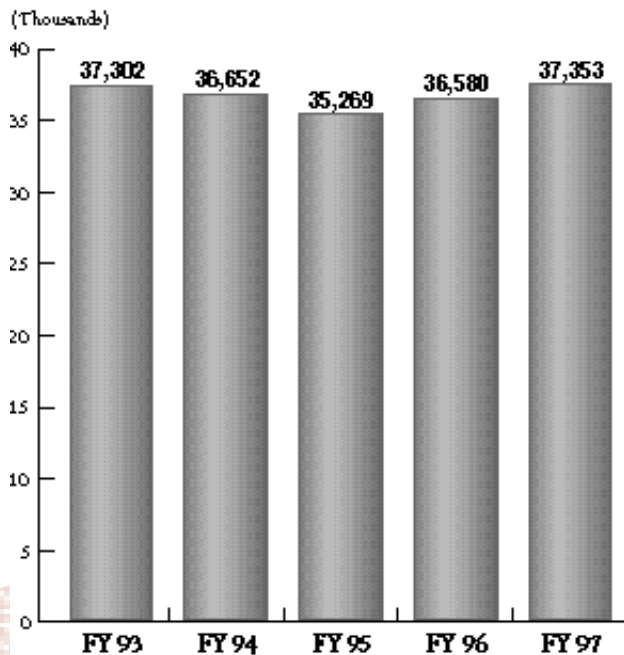
Parents can receive information about child care, and new providers can learn about the licensing process, by calling their

local PRS office. The agency also offers a toll-free child care information hotline (1-800-862-5252) to answer questions. In Fiscal Year 1997, the hotline responded to 6,725 calls from the public.

Licensing staff provided 775 training and professional development sessions for staff of licensed and registered facilities in 1997. Examples of topics that were offered are child minimum standards, recordkeeping, child health and safety, nutrition, age-appropriate activities, child guidance, and discipline.

Liz Plaster, past president of the Houston-area Association for the Education of Young Children, said, "When we want some clarification on issues, workers like Martin Dulek (r.) and others have come to our board meetings, conferences, and other functions. We in the early childhood community have found professionally that Licensing has been very supportive of us."

INSPECTIONS OF CHILD CARE FACILITIES



The agency also worked with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service to create a training program for providers and participated in statewide projects such as the Texas Child Care Working Group and the Texas Head Start Collaboration Project.

“Child-care licensing representatives, investigators, and their supervisors received more than 14,000 hours of training in such areas as interviewing child victims of abuse/neglect, cultural diversity, facility minimum standards, and program policy and procedure. The clerical and support staff participated in 1,350 hours of training that included customer service and the use of automated systems.

In fiscal year 1997, Licensing staff conducted 37,353 investigations to determine if facilities met minimum standards. Those failing to meet standards may be placed on evaluation or probation status, which increases the number of inspections and level of assistance they receive. If the risk to children is substantial, the license or registration may be suspended for a period or it may be revoked. Once revoked, operators may not reapply for two years. The agency also investigates complaints involving child care and serious occurrences. There were 911 investigations of abuse or neglect and 10,497 investigations of alleged standards violations in Fiscal Year 1997.

During its 1997 session, the Texas Legislature took several steps to help the agency better protect children in out-of-home care.

In 1994, a highly publicized case involving the death of a baby boy in the care of an unregulated home child-care provider brought to light the need for the state to help make out-of-home care safer. As a result, the 75th Texas Legislature enacted a law that will require criminal background checks of home child-care providers who care for three or fewer children. Previously, only home child-care providers who cared for four or more children in addition to their own were regulated by the state.

The change, which creates a new category of child care — listed family home — went into effect in January 1998. Anyone who is paid for regular child care in their own homes for one to three children not related to them must list with the agency.

Historically, the agency conducted criminal history checks of directors, owners, and staff of licensed child-care facilities and owners of registered facilities. The agency also checked directors and owners against its central database of people who have abused or neglected children. These checks were conducted only upon initial application. The agency checked about 160,000 people in Fiscal Year 1997.

Beginning on Sept. 1, 1997, the agency will check all child-care employees against its child abuse and neglect database initially and every 24 months thereafter. The agency will also check the criminal history of current directors, owners, and staff every 24 months. In the case of registered, listed family homes, and residential (24-hour)

facilities, this will include family members and people who live in the home or are frequently at the home while the children are in care. The agency may now deny a license, registration, or listing based on background check findings.

Other legislation that will affect Licensing in the next fiscal year includes the following:

- The Governor's Faith-based Task Force recommended that an alternative to licensing be created to help the child-care arena experience growth. As a result, the Legislature created the Alternative Accreditation Program, which allows child-care facilities and child-placing agencies to operate without a license if they meet or exceed state standards and are accredited by an organization approved by PRS. Once a facility or agency has been “accredited,” it will be monitored by the accreditation organization.

- PRS will now have the authority to require facilities to remain closed during judicial appeal periods if the agency revoked their license because of health or safety violations, effective April 1, 1998.

- PRS will act as the lead state agency to coordinate inspections of child-care facilities and form an interagency task force with agencies such as the Texas Department of Health and Texas Workforce Commission. The task force will help determine uniform standards and policies that will allow the agencies to coordinate inspections and share results. ■

THE YOUNG AT HEART project brings older adult volunteers to child-care centers where the children benefit from the extra love and attention the seniors have to share. The adults benefit from getting out and sharing their experience and wisdom. The project offers flexible hours. PRS joins with community organizations in coordination with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). In Fiscal Year 1997, Young at Heart expanded to 11 cities. Barbara J., a Young at Heart volunteer at the Windy Hill School in Walburg (below), said she wishes she could encourage other seniors to participate. "The kids here call me 'Oma.'"

Types of Facilities Regulated by Licensing

Day care

- Day-care centers provide care for more than 12 children under age 14 for less than 24 hours.
- Registered family homes provide care in the caregiver's home for up to six children under age 14, in addition to the caregiver's own children. They may also take in up to six more school-age children after school.
- Listed family homes — a new category of regulated child care effective Sept. 1, 1997 — provide regular care in a caregiver's home for one to three children who are not related to them. Unlike other facilities, listed family homes do not have minimum standards and are not inspected.
- Group day-care homes provide care for 7-12 children under age 14 for less than 24 hours a day.
- Kindergartens and nursery

schools provide care to children ages 2-7 for four hours a day or less.

- Drop-in care centers provide occasional care for short time periods.
- Schools, grades kindergarten and above, provide educational programs for children ages 5-13 during the same hours as public schools.

Residential

(licensed 24-hour care)

- Foster family homes provide care for up to six children.
- Foster group homes provide care for 7-12 children.
- Emergency shelters provide short-term residential care for children and food, clothing, shelter, and medical services as needed.
- Child-placing agencies arrange

or placement of children in adoption or foster care. Agencies are responsible for assuring that their foster homes meet standards.

Institutions providing basic child care provide 24-hour care but do not offer specialized programs such as those at emergency shelters and residential treatment centers.

Institutions serving mentally retarded children serve children or adolescents with deficits in intellectual function or adaptive behavior.

Residential treatment centers provide care and treatment for emotionally disturbed children and adolescents in an institutional setting.

Halfway houses serve as transitional living facilities for no more than 24 children under age 16. They provide therapeutic group living to help children make the transition to living in the community.

Therapeutic camps provide special outdoor experience programs for children over age 7 with behavioral problems.

Maternity homes provide residential care for four or more pregnant women or women who have given birth within two weeks prior to the date of admission. ■

Child Care Facilities in Texas

Day Care Licensing

	Facilities	Capacity
Day Care/Drop-in Centers	7,596	646,048
Kindergartens/Nursery Schools	305	19,776
Schools	80	6,958
Group Day Care Homes	1,791	21,562
Total Licensed/Certified Facilities	9,772	694,344
Registered Family Homes	11,079	66,474
Total Day Care Facilities	20,851	760,818

Residential Licensing

Residential Child Care Facilities:

Independent Foster Family Homes	73	213
Independent Foster Group Homes	41	466
Emergency Shelters	68	1,552
Institutions Providing Basic Care	81	4,883
Institutions Serving		
Mentally Retarded Children	8	249
Residential Treatment Centers	102	4,040
Halfway Houses	3	90
Therapeutic Camps	8	454
Total Residential Child Care Facilities	384	11,947

Child Placing Agencies (Total 196)

Agency Foster Homes	2472	10,434
Agency Foster Group Homes	192	1803
Total Agency Homes	2,664	12,237

Total Residential Facilities and Agency Homes

	3,048	24,184
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CPS Approved Foster Homes*	3,163	10,107
CPS Approved Adoptive Homes*	1,764	2,643
Maternity Homes	11	N/A
Child Care Administrators Licensed	1,381	N/A

*CPS STAFF VERIFY AND ASSURE THAT THESE HOMES MEET STANDARDS.