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Demand for Day Nurseries

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The wartime needs of industry have taken many women from the home into the factory, resulting in a definite increase in the number of children being cared for in day nursery centers.

These centers differ from the earlier types of nursery schools whose main responsibility was to provide experiences supplementary to those offered at home, for they must provide the care that homes cannot give.

The demand for women trained in child development is increasing daily, as communities realize the need for day nurseries. In Chicago alone, 50 nursery school teachers were wanted by April 1 and 100 will be needed by June 1. These schools are child care centers operated on funds from a social service foundation. Attempts are being made to incorporate the nurseries into the public school system.

Foreseeing the need for nursery schools to care for children whose home environment would be changed by the industrial pace of the times, the government in 1941 passed the Lanham Community Facilities Act, making it possible for federal funds to be used for day care of children with working mothers. An appropriation of 150 million dollars was made, which was later raised to 300 million. The community requesting aid must present a well worked out plan and must be willing to help finance it before these funds will be made available.

Seventy day care centers already are approved in Connecticut, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Oregon and California. They are in addition to the 1,500 nursery schools and 1,250 preschool play groups operated throughout the United States by the W.P.A. Since the W.P.A. program was discontinued March 1, it is expected that many of these nursery school projects can qualify for assistance under the Lanham Act. Recent official estimates indicate that some 12,000 day care centers may ultimately be needed.

Last quarter at Iowa State a course in Nursery School Planning was offered to senior child development majors. As a class project, the girls were given an opportunity to visit the former W.P.A. nursery school in Ames and to spend an entire day working in a child care center in Des Moines.

The centers are typical of the wartime child care centers. The staffs consist of one teacher, one paid assistant and two or three volunteer workers, in most cases. The buildings used are rather large houses which have been repaired to meet the standards set.

Each member of the staff has greater responsibilities and longer hours, due to the large enrollment and the long working hours of parents. Volunteer helpers require training and are irregular in attendance, also the cook is apt to be an older person with no nutrition training and little experience in food preparation for children. Increased food rationing and longer hours at defense plants may necessitate the serving of dinner to parents and children alike. The teachers must have a greater knowledge of money management in order to plan the operation costs.