

# Betty's: Our History

Assoc. Prof. Anne Thomas

Secretary, BSCCC Management Committee

BSCCC Annual General Meeting  
15 August 2023



## Who was Betty Spears?

Betty Spears speaking at an Equal Pay Rally in Sydney, 1969.



Sydney Morning Herald, 12 February 2012. Photo: Stuart MacGladrie.

## Who was Betty Spears?

- ▶ born 14 March 1926, to Jack and Mary Spears  
*My father was a railway man who believed everyone had to join a union, and we always talked unionism at home.*
- ▶ educated at St Brigid's Marrickville
- ▶ 1942: junior typist at NSW Dept of Labour and Industry
- ▶ 1952: joined Federated Clerks Union (FCU), became clerical worker with Bread Carters Union
- ▶ 1954: joined Australian Labor Party (ALP), started working for Vehicle Builders Union
- ▶ 1956: represented FCU on NSW Labor Council Equal Pay Committee
- ▶ 1968: FCU delegate to Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) congress, speaks at National Equal Pay Week rallies
- ▶ 1972: met ACTU delegates from the Shop Assistants Union in a ladies' room. They decide to form committee to push national case for equal pay, equal opportunity, shift-work rights, elimination of sexual harassment and **child care**.

# Who was Betty Spears?

Betty Spears in the mid 1970s.



# Who was Betty Spears?

- ▶ 1979: Medal of the Order of Australia, for her services to the trade union movement
- ▶ 2012: Tribute in Parliament by the Hon. Sophie Cotsis:

*Betty passed away on 19 January this year. She is survived not just by family and friends but by a living memorial that she created and saw while she was alive. In 1984, after a long, hard struggle and a four-year campaign, Betty secured funding from the State Labor Government for a long day care centre for the children of bus employees. Betty was helped by a number of people in that campaign including her very good friend Beryl Ashe . . .*

*The Betty Spears Child Care Centre is a living monument to Betty's activism and dedication to the practical task of building a better life for working people and their families in New South Wales.*

# 1980-1984: Establishing the Centre

## BACKGROUND TO THE TEMPE CHILD CARE PROJECT:

- The Combined Transport Unions had been agitating for some time for the Department of Transport to provide a building at Central Railway for the purposes of establishing a child care centre.
- The Labor Council and the Premier's Department became involved and, in March, 1980, the Minister for Transport, Mr Cox, offered land adjacent to the Tempe Bus Depot, a suitable building at Central apparently not being available.
- In March, 1980, the Premier's Department called a meeting. Among those bodies represented were:
  - . Women's Co-ordination Unit
  - . Premier's Department
  - . Trades and Labor Council
  - . Combined Transport Unions
  - . Working Women's Charter Group
  - . Women's Trade Union Commission

At that meeting, the Women's Trade Union Commission was given the task of submitting for child care funding to the Office of Child Care on behalf of the Combined Transport Unions.

- The submission requesting \$200,000 capital as well as recurrent funding (copy attached) was presented to the Office of Child Care in August 1980. The Office of Child Care advised that funds available in 1980/81 had been fully committed and that the submission would be reconsidered in the context of the 1981/82 budget.

# 1980-1984: Establishing the Centre

## TEMPE CHILD CARE PROJECT

### STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD LABOR COUNCIL BUILDING, FRIDAY,

12TH NOVEMBER, 1982 AT 11.00 a.m.

Present:

M. Bolton	-	AT & MOEA
Betty Spears	-	Labor Council Working Women's Charter Committee
Brenda Forbath	-	A.C.T.U.
Joan Evans	-	W.T.U.C.
Lois Cleal	-	A.T.O.F.
Helen Campbell	-	Women's Co-ordination Unit
June de Lorenzo	-	A.T. & M.O.E.A.
Marie Andrews	-	A.R.U.
Beryl Ashe	-	Labor Council Women's Advisory Office

*Robin Ames ATOF*  
(B. Ashe in Chair)

Beryl Ashe gave a report on events to date: The alternative site at Tempe Station was found to be unsuitable, due to presence of high tension power and gas lines.

The Hearing in the Supreme Court on 1st November, 1982 had, however, been successful in that the Court had ordered the squatter on the Gannon Street, Tempe site to vacate the land by 31st January, 1983. No further legal action would be required prior to 1st February, 1982.

Beryl read correspondence from the Minister for Transport, the Hon. P. Cox, who indicated that, in view of the Court's decision, it was presumed an alternative site would not now be required.

A meeting had been held with the Housing Commission, in company with Joan Evans, to view plans and arrangements had been made for the Housing Commission to draw up plans for the Centre. When finalised, tenders would be called and this was expected to be some time in the New Year.

# 20th February 1984: the Centre opens



Emma Reddish at the centre... now childcare goes on 24 hours a day.

## Twenty-four-hour childcare gets off to a nervous start

By ZOE NEVILL

Daniel sent the beds to me which one he wanted. "I like this one," he said, bounding off the ground because if I fall out I won't hurt my head."

Daniel is one of about six children already using the Betty Spence Childcare Centre in Tempe — Australia's first 24-hour childcare service.

"It's a pilot project and lots of people are watching to see how it goes," said the co-ordinator, Katy Gould.

The project took four years of work by the mobilised transport workers' unions, the Children's Services Resource and Development Ltd and the NSW Labor Council. This week, a month after its inception, it opened 24 hours a day.

"Twenty-four-hour care is still an unknown," said the Labor Council childcare officer, Fran Simons. "We don't fit any of the formulae (the Government's) here."

The 1972 Federal Childcare Act did not envisage 24-hour childcare.

"Everyone is a bit nervous," a spokesman at the Federal Office of Childcare said the other day. "It really falls outside the Act so we have to develop a new policy."

The Government is conducting a six-month survey at Tempe and two other centres seen to go 24 hours — Inner City Care and another at the University of NSW — before deciding on how to amend the Act.

For subsidy is one of the biggest problems, as it is based on projected estimates of regular attendances. The workers who use the centre charge their child's each week, sometimes only at a day's notice.

The centre gives priority to the children of the 25 unions associated with public transport, but it also has places for the local community.

These children collected by the buses in the evening or sleeping overnight are bathed and put into pyjamas at 5pm. At 8 they sit down to dinner and bedtime is between 7 and 9, depending on the age of the child.

Until the centre opened, shift workers had to lock their children in parked cars, leave them with friends or relatives or pay out up to half their wages for private nannies.

Queens and Joe Kakana came to Australia from New Zealand four years ago to work on the buses. They had no one to turn to here. They brought a baby-sitter over from New Zealand to live in, paying her the wages, a wage of \$100 a week, and providing food and accommodation.

The mother got married to the Kakana woman in with another couple and shared the responsibility of these children. "It was difficult living one family in a 24-hour household," Queens said.

Now their children go to the Tempe centre and they are looking forward to having a place of their own.

Carolyn Jurin is also a bus driver. She used to have to come to take her daughter, Sarah, to an and from a day care centre each day. When she worked night shift she also had to pay a nanny.

The centre cost \$100 a week and the pick-up service another \$30, while a night-care sister also cost \$30. Tempe costs her \$60. "We need more of them," she said.



Martin Hayward and his son Rupert, aged 14 months, outside the Tempe centre.



# 1980s: the 24-hour Centre

## RAILROAD

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE NEW BRANCH OF THE AUSTRALIAN RAILWAYS UNION

VOL. 73, No. 6 JUNE-JULY 1984 PRICE 1 CENT

### Retirement board establishes co-operative housing society

# FUND GIVEN \$5m FOR HOME LOANS

**MEMBERS** will have read of proposals to provide housing loans for contributors to the NSW Retirement Fund and the Transport Retirement Fund, following their organisation under the umbrella of the Public Authorities Superannuation Board.

The new Association decided that a Housing Co-operative Society would be set up to provide such loans.

The inaugural meeting of the new Housing Society was held on June 20, and included the following:

- The Hon. W. A. Wilson, Minister for Railways
- Mr. W. A. Wilson, Chairman, Retirement Fund Office
- Mr. J. B. Smith, Director, NSW

The Society will be administered by the Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd, and is a not-for-profit organisation.

A number of high-requirements will need to be fulfilled before the first loans can be repaid.

While no decision has been made as to the exact amount of loans and terms, it is expected that a well-serve client for housing loans, operated by the Transport and Government Superannuation Fund.



**By the Branch Secretary, JOHN MALONE**

Under the Fund, the chairman has a \$75,000, subject to retirement saving, and the maximum rate of 30% of the amount of income of any member.

The new society, which is the Local Government Co-operative Housing Society is to pay out about \$5m, which is subject to income of members during the loan term.

When applicants make their initial application to the Society, the interest will not be taken until the loan is repaid, which can be returned to the Society without the need for interest.

Values approved by both the Society and the Registrar of Co-operative Housing Societies will be used for valuation purposes where loans are concerned.

Contributors will be able to make periodic repayments through to both Retirement organisations on their days off work or during their leave being allowed to have their repayments deducted directly from their pay sheets.

This will be of considerable assistance to NSW members, as they will be able to have their repayments of interest and principal to contribute towards the amount of their loan.

- Build a house or make additions to a house.
- Buy a house already owned.
- Buy a house and register under the Home Tax Act 1971.

Members should write to the Branch, 1000-1005 of Railway and Harbour from the ASU for further information.



**Work? This is it child's play!**  
In just a few in the world, and why would you? This is the ultimate happy thing to do for you and your family. You can be a member of the NSW Superannuation Fund, which is the ultimate happy thing to do for you and your family. You can be a member of the NSW Superannuation Fund, which is the ultimate happy thing to do for you and your family. You can be a member of the NSW Superannuation Fund, which is the ultimate happy thing to do for you and your family.

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# 1980s: the 24-hour Centre

JUNE-JULY 1984



## All smiles at the Child Care Centre

**THE Betty Spang Child Care Centre — Australia's first 24-hour child care centre — is at 2A Gannon Street, Tempo, near Tempo Station.**

The centre can accommodate 40 children aged up to five years during the day. Children can attend regularly or occasionally; you can book your child for five days a week or for only a few hours.

Twelve children aged up to 12 can be accommodated during the night. They can attend every night or occasionally, depending on what you require.

Before and after school care is available for 15 school aged children. Children can be dropped at the centre early in the morning, taken to school, and/or collected from school in the afternoon

and taken back to the centre.

There is a sliding scale of fees related to income. The fees given below are maximum charges. If you feel they are beyond your means, then you can apply for a low rate provided you are willing to give proof of income.

**For Regular Users:**  
■ \$10 a week — includes meals, 8-12 hours care a day, five days a week.  
■ \$10 a week, includes meals, 8-12 hours care.

■ \$1 a hour for less than eight hours' care a day (Meals included).

■ Occasional care: \$1.50 an hour (Meals included).

■ Public Holidays: \$1.50 an hour for up to eight hours' care. \$15.00 for 8-12 hours' care. These represent usual rates plus 50 per cent extra for higher operating

costs (Meals included).

There are 16 staff employed at the centre, including trained nurses, assistants, teachers, child care certificate workers and a full-time cook.

They are all experienced, warm and caring, and are committed to providing a happy and secure environment for the children.

The building is brand new and equipped with a wide range of toys, books, puzzles and musical instruments. There is a big grassy outdoor area and a sandpit for outdoor play.

The AKU has always been the forefront in supporting this Project.

To take advantage of the centre's facilities now or to place your name on a waiting list, you are advised to contact Katy GOULD, the centre's director, on 551 8350.

JUNE-JULY 1984

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## 1980s: the 24-hour Centre

### DIRECTORS REPORT

Tuesday, 12th March, 85

#### Enrolment

- There are currently 82 children (aprox) using the Centre each week.
- Day care is full. Before school has 11 permanent enrolments and after school care is full with 16 enrolments.
- Evening care is full every night and any absentees are usually filled with occassional care.
- Overnight placements are light as shift workers are collecting their children after their shift ends rather than leaving them until morning.

#### Birthday Party

The Centre held its 1st Birthday Party on 20th February. This was a very pleasant evening. An excellent turn up of families and the children were entertained with a disco, activities, face painting and pinatas.

1986:

- ▶ incorporation as not-for-profit, independent, community-run "Betty Spears Child Care Centre"
- ▶ volunteer Management Committee of 8-12 current parents

# 1980s: the 24-hour Centre

**Last week's protest in Martin Place by 500 women brought into focus the anger and concern over the Federal Government's proposed cuts of \$63 million to child care and nursery school services.**  
**SCOTT HOWLETT reports.**

**MOTHERS** are now putting their children's names on waiting lists for child care centres even before the children are born.

Children under five in NSW may be waiting up to three years before they get placed at some government-funded child care centres.

And with the \$63 million Federal Government cut on child care expected to be enforced from January 1, the situation will grow much worse.

The Kindergarten Union said fees in its pre-schools will go up by 40 per cent. The NSW Government said child care fees must rise to about \$17 a day and that the quality of child care may decline. It is estimated that only 8.5 per cent of children needing child care can be placed.

Each of 20 child care centres contacted by *The Sun-Herald* were operating at full capacity with many children on the waiting list.

The Minister for Youth and Community Services, Mr Frank Walker, described child care facilities in NSW as hopelessly inadequate.

He said the system was threatened with collapse after the Federal Government's cuts in which the State would lose \$12 million. "The cuts spell disaster for early-childhood services," Mr Walker said. "Child care centres and pre-schools will be forced to close."

"The fact that care is so hard to find means real hardship for mothers, particularly working mothers; it also means toddlers may not get the expert care and chances for early development which most experts agree they need."

The Federal Government has not only denied children in NSW the right to pre-school care and education, but has denied many parents the right to work.

Mrs Vanessa Burton, of Lakemba, had her son John on a waiting list for two years - he is five

## Child care it's costly and chaotic

years old now and at infants school. Mrs Burton, 32, said she had to reject many job opportunities while waiting for her son to be placed.

She said: "The Government talk about getting more women into the workforce. But how can they when the Government won't allow children to get into the centres?"

The lack of child care facilities is also affecting the children. Psychologists agree that the first five years of a child's life are the most important, and say denying children certain care in these formative years can have detrimental effects in later life.

Mr Walker said he hoped to provide more child-care services in the workplace.

"The Government has paid for several experts in the child-care field to travel around, talking to employers about the desirability of providing child care in the workplace. As yet, we have not seen a great response from employers, but I hope many companies will see the value of providing such facilities," he said.

One of the women who helped establish the Betty Spearn 24-hour child care centre in Tempe, Jane De Lorenza, warned that shift workers with children under five years old would find it extremely

hard to find child care facilities.

The director of the only 24-hour centre in NSW, Mrs Diana Jackson, said the cuts would be "dreadful" for the shift and rotating workers who use the centre at night. Seventeen per cent of the parents who use the centre at night came from the transport industries, she said. Parents who study at night also use the facility.

"As an example of the parents' predicament," Mrs Jackson said, "we have one fellow here who has two kids at the centre. He is a bus driver and his wife is a process worker. They both work at night and already pay \$100 per week to have their children

taken care of.

"When the child-care cost goes up they will have to pay \$20 per week more. They are going to find this extra cost hard to meet because, as they are paying off their house, they are already using up all their income."

In approving the Budget cut to child care, Mr Walker said Prime Minister Hawke had made a mockery of his election promise to provide 20,000 new child-care places nationally.

"We may get a smattering of extra child-care facilities in NSW, but only the rich will be able to afford to send their children to them," Mr Walker said.



MANY parents on night shift leave their children in care.



ALL dressed up for painting.

# 1990s to present: Long day care

Profile: John Willson

## Offering service stability in a time of crisis

The Betty Spears Child Care Centre has seen many challenges over the years and is now one of the most stable services in Sydney. Coming from a background of primary school teaching and youth related services, John Willson has devoted the last twelve years to childcare work and will soon be leaving the centre. We spoke to John about his achievements and his plans for the future.



John Willson at the Betty Spears Child Care Centre in Tempe.

**You've worked with children for virtually your entire career. How did you first become involved in children's services?**

I commenced my career, initially as a primary school teacher and, prior to coming across to Betty Spears Child Care Centre, I worked for the Department of Community Services for 18 years, working with state wards and children with special needs. I ended up working in the administration of detention centres and remand centres for young offenders, centres that were based in Country New South Wales as well as in Sydney. I was superintendent at two of these establishments back in the 1980s. I left the Department in 1989 and commenced at Betty Spears in 1990.

**Was it difficult when you first arrived at the centre?**

At that stage, in 1990, the centre had very significant financial troubles and was, in fact, forced to restructure. Betty Spears started off as a 24-hour childcare centre—to my knowledge, the only centre in the country to ever provide this kind of service. Unfortunately, due to a lack of usage during the

night periods, it made huge losses every year between 1984 to 1990 and, consequently, received additional assistance from Federal Government. It was called 'deficit funding' in those days. During the 1980s the Government was prepared to keep bailing it out, but in 1990, it decided to call a halt!

So, the centre had to restructure or close down and this coincided with the point that I became the centre's director. This process involved cutting the hours, initially down from 24 down to 18 hours per day—but even reducing the operating hours down to 18 wasn't successful, as there still wasn't enough usage at night. In late 1990, the committee had to make the decision again to cut the centre back to conventional long day care hours—7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m.—which are the hours that we've operated on successfully ever since.

After all that, an additional problem emerged where the government demanded the return of a large portion of funds that had been advanced to the centre during the 1980s. Over the next three years, we had to repay the entire amount and, as I can recall, it was about \$60,000!

That was my introduction to the centre and it was pretty difficult—I thought I'd actually faced some pretty tough times with the young offenders but the initial few months at Betty Spears were pretty torrid. I began to wonder what I was doing there, but we managed to get through the tough times. We established a good relationship with the unions and, obviously, the staff and from then on, we've really gone on from strength-to-strength after facing all those challenges earlier on.

**Children's services can be a difficult area to work in. What attracted you to it?**

I already had a lengthy background working with young people and I saw this as an opportunity to extend my skills to the younger children. With my educational and administrative background, I thought it was most appropriate to work in this area and particularly suitable in an independent small operation like Betty Spears Child Care Centre. Being a smaller operation meant that I was able to have

## 2004 to 2006: Crisis averted

Member for Heffron Kristina Keneally MP, 15 September 2005:

*I was able to save the Betty Spears Child Care Centre from a sell-off by the State Transit Authority.*

NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard - 15 September 2005

## 2004 to 2006: Crisis averted

- ▶ 20 year lease 1984–2004, peppercorn rent \$1 p.a.
- ▶ 12 month leases 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 for \$5200 p.a., during negotiations with the STA
- ▶ Educators and Management Committee saved \$ by doing cleaning work, cutting food costs etc
- ▶ 5-year+ leases 2006–2021

## 2006 to present: Stability





## 2006 to present: Stability ... ?

March 2020 to ? : Covid

- ▶ sector-wide crisis
- ▶ many Betty's parents essential workers: bus drivers, midwives, teachers, ...



## 2023 Snapshot

- ▶ affordable care, since not-for-profit
- ▶ 87 children, 74 families
- ▶ enrolments from Tempe, Earlwood, Marrickville, St Peters, Sydenham, Wolli Creek, ...
- ▶ long waiting lists
- ▶ 26 staff, some at Betty's for 20+ years



# 2024: Our 40th birthday bash

