



Background on the South Madison Day Care Center Facility

The idea for the South Madison Day Care Center operated by Child Development Incorporated, was originated by the Foundation for Friendship, an organization established in 1968 to improve cross cultural communications and understanding between Madison's different racial and ethnic communities. That year, Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination and his call for Black progress and cross-racial harmony influenced the Foundation's members and motivated their development of CDI's South Madison center. It was a highly visible project in the late 60s and throughout the 70s, and Madison's most influential leaders and philanthropists were involved with the project, including Rosalie Mayer, wife of Oscar Mayer, who Chaired the Board of Attic Angel and helped lead fundraising for the center.

Many hands supported the effort. The Attic Angel Association financed the full cost of the building of the center for \$110,000 (equivalent to \$722,124 today). Prominent Madison architect [Henry Kanazawa](#) of the Bowen & Kanazawa Firm designed the building. The Westside Rotary Club built the fence. The Westside Garden Club donated the flowers that adorned the landscape of the center. Alderman Harold Rohr and the Community of John the 23rd provided painters. Several men volunteered their time to do carpentry work. A Girl Scout Troop and a University of Wisconsin Fraternity also helped complete the project. The Foundation for Friendship made a five year commitment to the Center, paying \$7,000 in utility bills annually. The Oscar Mayer Foundation contributed scholarship money to provide free daycare to working mothers and to mothers who were adult students who could not afford the tuition. Additional funds were raised through donations, Christmas card sales, an annual carnival and other projects.

The groundbreaking for the building was held on Thursday, April 17, 1969. It was opened on November 16th that year with 38 children. A formal public dedication was held December 6, 1969. Thousands of people came to see the center during its first few years of operation, and it soon became the training ground for hundreds of early childhood teachers, in affiliation with UW-Madison. Over the course of the next 10 years, CDI would grow to serve children in eight centers across Dane County, making it the fourth largest provider of childcare in Wisconsin next to the Catholic and Lutheran Churches and a Head Start program in Milwaukee.

The South Madison Center initially served children from 2yrs 9mos old through kindergarten age. The Center was open 51 weeks per year from 7am – 5:30pm daily, Monday through Friday. Tuition was based on a family's ability to pay and children did not have to live in the neighborhood to attend. However, child care was generally free or offered at low tuition rates to families living in nearby neighborhoods.

CDI, as the center would soon become known, had one teacher for every nine children. Volunteers were used to transport children to the center, to take children on field trips, and to host parties and programs. The center also received the following donations: toys, sleds, ice skates, flying saucers, roller skates, bicycles, rocking horses, record players and other play equipment. "Children participated in recreational, arts and crafts, music and dance activities. They learned home experiences such as table manners and simple housekeeping chores and had access to many books and creative toys."

In the 1970s, CDI began offering summer school for 5 and 6 year olds. By February 1969, CDI was operating four centers:

1. First United Methodist Church on Wisconsin Avenue for 14 children ages 3 to 5 during the school year, and ages 3 to 7 over the summer;
2. Middleton Community Church;
3. South Madison Day Care Center; and
4. Beth El Child Care Center.

In total, 116 children were served in these four schools. Parents were charged \$16 per week (the equivalent to \$105 per week in 2014).

In 1971, Mrs. William Bradford Smith, president of CDI's Board of Directors, called the preschool an "an impossible dream come true." She shared that, "When we started out, there was just no hope." The Center ultimately included four large classrooms, a restaurant-styled kitchen where daily hot lunches and morning snacks were prepared, and a large upstairs sleeping room. It also had a fenced in playground, seven offices and a meeting room. The basement was "eventually to be turned into an after-school activity area for older neighborhood children". "It's a community effort," Mrs. Smith said. The Attic Angels donated the money for the building while Foundations for Friendship equipped it and CDI ran the daily operations of the day care center."

CDI also offered auxiliary programs to neighborhood residents. A health screening program was offered at CDI to South Madison residents twice per week from 5pm to 7pm. Free services that were offered include blood pressure, vision, diabetes and dental screening sponsored by the Student National Medical Association, St. Mary's Hospital and the University of Wisconsin Medical School. In October 1971, CDI was approved by the Madison Metropolitan School District to operate a childcare center at Dudgeon School on Monroe Street. Soon after, they began serving 32 children at that location. In August 1972, CDI announced the opening of a center at 206 Bernard Court in partnership with the Wisconsin Union of the UW-Madison campus. Fifty percent of the openings at the center were to be given to children of UW-Madison students, 25 percent to children of faculty members and 25 percent to children of classified personnel. Enrollment was limited to children between the ages of 2yrs 9mos and 5 years old. The center is now called Bernie's place and is operated by UW-Madison.

To raise funds and support community building in South Madison, CDI hosted an annual carnival. Its first event took place in 1971 at the center. Two years later, the South Madison Block Party was launched in collaboration with the South Madison Neighborhood Center (now the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County). Proceeds from the Block Party supported the annual operating costs of CDI and the Neighborhood Center. In the early 1980s, the Block Party annually drew between 3,500 – 5,000 people to South Madison’s Penn Park for food, music, dance, vendors, live entertainment, a regional softball tournament and popular cross-state basketball tournament that attracted teams from as far away as Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Missouri.

CDI received significant press coverage between 1968 and 1977, but largely dropped out of the press after issues with racial segregation in Madison’s public schools and the closure of South Madison’s Lincoln Middle School, took over. Annually thereafter, there would be one or two significant news articles each year featuring CDI’s block party, a special program or its leadership. In 1990, Attic Angel, which owned CDI’s facility and leased it at no cost to CDI, gifted the building to CDI and began reducing their annual financial commitment to the center. When the organization’s long-time leader, Rosie Baker, retired in the mid-90s, the organization was struggling under the weight of increasing annual costs, declining annual enrollments, changing demographics and increased incidence of violence in its neighborhood, a weakened South Madison Neighborhood Center that once served as a strong partner and ally, and a reduction in annual giving as many of CDI’s early and long-time supporters had died or moved on to other projects.

Between 1994 and 2006, CDI faced the threat of closure several times. However, each time, a donor stepped in to provide temporary support. In a Sunday, June 18, 2006 news article in the Wisconsin State Journal, journalist Bill Wineke pointed out that the “Day Care Center on Fisher Street was meant to be a sign that Madison cares. It was built with the assistance of White Christian congregations. Members of my own church, the Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ, actually took out second mortgages on their homes in order to help out.” In 2006, CDI launched a \$200,000 fundraising campaign to avoid closing the center. According to Steve Lein, CDI’s executive director at the time, the organization was losing \$30,000 monthly. He credited the challenges to three things: (1) an enrollment of 26 students instead of the 65 they originally projected, (2) inadequate government funding, and (3) management problems that existed before he arrived.

CDI eventually succumbed to the challenges it faced, caused by its fluctuating enrollment, and rapid changes in financial support and center leadership. On July 31, 2014, with just 19 to 25 children regularly attending, the Board of Directors of CDI officially closed its South Madison Day Center and worked with other agencies to help families find new child care options for their children. Its Board also began working with the founders of One City Early Learning Centers to ensure a stronger child care center will take root in South Madison. One City is presently working to purchase CDI’s South Madison Day Care facility, and will launch a new brand of preschools that serve children ages 6 weeks old to 5 years old, and their families. One City hopes to open its doors on Monday, June 1, 2014 and will grow to serve 114 children.