INTRODUCTION

Day Care Services as stipulated in the Social Services Agencies (Operators of Day Care Facilities) (Registration, Licensing and Minimum Operating Requirements) is “the care and supervision of five or more children between ages one day to five years old, for up to twelve or more business hours a day. Day Care Facilities are defined as “the entirety of the premises where the day care services are to be provided as identified in the license.”

These facilities are licensed under the Social Services Agencies (Operators of Day Care Facilities) (Registration, Licensing and Minimum Operating Requirements) Regulations, 2003. The Act stipulates the minimum requirements for a license to operate; and ongoing operation of a license facility addressing areas such as General Administration Policies, Minimum Requirements for the Physical Environment, Minimum Programming Requirements, and Minimum Health and Safety Requirements, .

The Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation (MHSTPA), through the Inspector of Social Services Institutions (ISSI) is tasked with the responsibility for the licensing, registration and regulation of day care facilities countrywide

Section 16 of the regulations states that “Every operator registered and licensed under these Regulations shall implement general operating policies to govern the administration and operation of the day care facility,” Therefore it is required that an applicant prepare a parent handbook to support their application for licensure. The handbook is a guide to indicate how you wish to operate your facility; ensuring that such standards of operation are cohesive with that of legal requirements as stipulated in the Social Services Agencies ( Operators of Day Care Facilities) (Registration, Licensing and Minimum Operating Requirements) Regulations, 2003.

A Parent Handbook is required when:
1. A new day care facility is established and submits application for licensure.

2. An existing licensed day care facility is being purchased by a new operator

In addition, it is recommended that applicants prepare a business plan prior to submission of application. A business plan will serve as a guide for operating the business and can assist in identifying the varied components of starting and operating a financially sustainable day care facility.

Another major step is finding a suitable site. Whether the facility is leased, purchased or constructed, a well located, aesthetically pleasing, safe and functional space is important. Operator must ensure that such physical aspects of the facility are in compliance with the standards as stipulated in the Social Services Agencies Act, requirements of the Central Building Authority, Department of Public Health and the Belize Fire Department.

**Items to Consider**

A license Day Care Facility for Children must comply with the minimum operating standards as is set out in the Social Services Agencies (Operators of Day Care Facilities) (Registration, Licensing, and Minimum Operating Requirements) Regulations, 2003, providing:

1) A **physical** environment ensuring that the day care facility is a place where children learn and play safely, as well as engage in a variety of activities without risk to their own safety. (19 (1)

2) A **developmentally appropriate program plan** composed of activities that meet and enhance the individual needs of children with different cultural, language, and developmental differences and special needs. (21) (1)

3) An appropriate number of trained staff who understands the needs of the children and can appropriately delivers quality care.

The parent handbook serves as a contract between you and the parent and as your facility’s operations manual. You should have parents sign a form in which they acknowledge that they have received, read, and agree to abide by the principles outlined in the handbook. Below is a list of items to include in your handbook. You may wish to add or rearrange the list of subjects.
1. Day care facility name, address, and phone number.

2. Name of the owner, director, and any other people in management or leadership

3. Philosophy of care (overall goal of the day care facility)

4. Ages served

5. Hours/Days of operation

6. Holidays/ Other days the facility is closed

7. Admittance and withdrawal policy (16) (a)

8. Fees/Payment policies and procedures (including acceptable form of payment and late fees) (16) (b)

9. Items to be brought along by parents.

10. Items that cannot be brought to your facility.

11. Drop off and pick up policy (16) (d)

12. Absences (What are your policies around absences? Do you expect to be notified if a child will not be in child care for the day? If so, at what point do you expect be notified? Do you expect to be paid for absences?)

13. Required forms upon enrolment at the facility (Child enrolment form, Immunization Records, Statement of Health of Child to be enrolled, Copy of Birth Certificate and Social Security Card, Authorization form for administering of medication, Authorization form for emergency health care, field trip permission form, to be completed by parent whenever the child is participating in a field trip organized by the Provider. ) (As included in the Social Services Agencies (Operators of Day Care Facilities) (Registration, Licensing and Minimum Operating Requirements) Regulations, 1998.)

14. Program summaries and Policies (Daily Activities (16) (c), Nutrition and Health Policy (16) (f), Emergency, Illness or accident Policy, Behavior Management Policy for child and staff members (16) (g), Grievance Policy for parents and staff). 13 (2) (A) (II), Staff training and development policy (16) (h), Parent Involvement Policy (Do you expect parent participation in the program? Do you want parents to volunteer in the day care facility? Do you hold individual parent conferences or group meetings?) (18)

15. Termination of care (under what situations you will refuse to continue caring for children)
Upon receipt of the handbook, the Inspector of Social Services Institution will vet for completeness

There are three possible outcomes following the vetting process:

1) Proposal for operation is approved

2) Handbook is returned, or meeting held with applicant, specifically identifying components that do not meet the requirements with recommendations for revisions and/or additions.

3) Proposal for operation is halted on the grounds that Applicant no longer wishes to proceed with licensing application.

Handbook should be reviewed annually, if there are any changes made to the operation and program of the facility; changes to be forwarded, in writing, to the Inspector of Social Services Institution (ISSI) under the heading “Amendment to Parent Handbook, listing the name of facility, and date of amendment. The Ministry to approval all changes made prior to the facility implementation.