

When your child is close by

A resurgence of hope to working parents with Parliament passing Maternity Bill 2017

By NEERAJA MURTHY

A PTA is in progress on the first floor of ACT Fibre Net office in Banjara Hills. It is the first session for Ram, a parent whose two-and-half-year-old son Arush is part of the daycare centre, in his very own office. If all goes well, daycare centres in or near offices will be a reality soon.

Daycare centres

The Sunshine day care centre at ACT Fibre Net, is run by SatNav preschools and daycare chain, which has 10 such facilities including ISB, Novartis, Hexagon, Tata Advanced Systems and DRL. March 2017 has special significance for women, with the passage of the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2017 by Parliament, as per which 26 weeks of paid maternity leave is mandatory for all women employed in the organised sector. It also makes childcare a socially-shared responsibility by making it mandatory for employers with 50 or more employees to provide crèches in close vicinity of the workplace and by allowing women up to four daily visits to the crèche.

Long drawn exercise

Amit Kishore Prasad, managing director of SatNav Pre-schools (P) Ltd, is relieved. Once the Bill got passed, the company put up a banner outside their office an-



Play time Children during their activity session NAGARA GOPAL

nouncing the facilities offered.

"We have been tracking this since May/June last year when the intent was first announced. It was a long drawn exercise and what we realised was that at every stage the intention was good but it wouldn't move ahead. Thank God, it been done in this session." As part of the facility, SatNav provides the services, staff, toys and teachers while the com-

panies hosting the facility provide the infrastructure.

Jyothi, who works as a sales co-ordinator in ACT Fibre Net (previously Beam Telecom) had resigned from in 2015 because there was no one to take care of her daughter at home. "But I joined the office in the same year in September because of the childcare facility for my daughter Harshini," she states and calls the facility, a major stress reliever. "This centre in office is a huge relief. She is just a two-minute away

from me. Any time I want, I can come here to look at her from outside." Amit speaks of the boost from this initiative. "The other benefit is government is concentrating on child care too; it is a needed shift. You are empowering parents to use the facility and stabilise their careers. Child care will allow parents to be comfortable and bring their child to work. It is a big step as it protects the careers and people have less disruption to their work," he explains.

Counsellors observe that these

centres provide an emotional support to the little ones. "Having a facility near work makes mothers feel more comfortable and definitely reduces stress and anxiety," avers counsellor Aarti Tatineni.

"Mothers are in control and will be able to even breastfeed if they desire to do so. At the same time, facilities with too many children can increase the risk of infections especially among children younger than one year. Staff not trained well can result in unexpected injuries." For slightly grown up children, she feels parents can prepare them by regularly talking to them. "Young children will definitely benefit by knowing that their parents are close by provided the parents can visit them once in two hours. They can also prepare children for the same through talks and discussions at home (when the kids are slightly older).

Introducing quality crèches with trained service providers is mandatory for this model to be a success." The pre-school concept was at a nascent stage when Sunshine first started its centre in Ameerpet in 2005.

"The market has evolved from a pre-school concept to child care concept. When the government talks about this, it is very exciting for us," smiles Amit.

However, Jai Ganesh, DGM-corporate of SatNav sounds a tone of caution. "The disadvantage is that a company can have a room and toys and call it as a crèche. They might say we have informed the employees and they don't make use of it." Amit hopes the companies will not spoil the intention by adhering to the letter of the bill instead of its spirit.

"Focus on the values you are imparting. If you want attrition to come down, absenteeism to be less and want them to be more comfortable if they have to take half-an-hour extra at work, these should be the goals and will only be met if you have a tie-up which makes sense and not something which is done to fill a HR record."



Child care

Daycare is a service used when the parents are at work.

It could be a nanny at a centre or a school. In some Indian families, grandparents and relatives babysit the children.

