

Just as the new edition of Penelope Leach's classic **Your Baby and Child** is published today, a new community *entirely* based on principles set out in her book **Children First** is being built in the USA.

Is it idealistic to believe that a community entirely based on the interests of children can be created from scratch? Not so, according to Kay Beckett Sullivan. She has been so influenced by Leach's work that she resolved to look for a way of implementing her ideas, and decided to found a community which put the psychologist's principles into practise. Undeterred when local government wouldn't fund the project, Kay approached private investors and the Winthrop development is now underway, being built by DPZ Architects and Town Planners of Miami with prospective house-buyers, retailers and two schools already committed.

Winthrop aims to be the first "Children First" community in the world, a physical environment designed with the specific needs of children in mind. Pedestrian-friendly, safety-conscious, full of interesting open spaces and with supermarkets that have special checkouts for people with children - no waiting and no chocolate bars in sight! Winthrop has children's interests integrated into the development plan and believes that it will therefore offer a better place in which people of all ages can live. "Children First because we are all children first" says Penelope Leach.

With more of the community on paper than on the ground, it remains to be seen how the plans for Winthrop will develop. But in the current global political climate it is somehow reassuring to see a small project that is working from the grass roots up, with the ideas of a leading children's advocate at its core.

A NEW EDITION OF  
**YOUR BABY & CHILD**  
IS PUBLISHED BY DORLING KINDERSLEY  
TODAY AT £16.99

"There's only one baby book that really works – this is it"

**Claire Rayner on *Your Baby & Child***

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## **"CHILDREN FIRST" FAMILY CENTRE AND DAYCARE GROUPS**

The focal point of the Winthrop community will be the **family centre**, as described by Penelope,

- The centre will serve as a drop-in centre or informal club for anyone caring for a baby whether it be parent or step-parent, nanny or au-pair, relative or care-giver
- It will take the isolation out of being home based and over time strong relationships between adults and between children will be built so that the centre becomes rather like an extended family

Daycare groups, flexibly constituted to serve parents' working any combination of hours, would be in the same setting, so every child's introduction to managing regularly without a parent or permanent caretaker of her own could be gradual and individually planned and paced.

Children might then graduate into part-time hours in professionally-run toddler group, building their confidence and independence towards readiness for the (already familiar) pre-school education group, with full-time care for those who needed it.

Children in those pre-school care groups will not be the oldest who use the centre because it will also serve as a focal point for older children's out-of-school and vacation care. Children who could not go "home" at 3pm could nevertheless be brought to a "home-base" in the community, and share leisure time with younger brothers and sisters and with local friends attending different schools. Having both or all their children gathered in the same safe and friendly place, on the home side of the commute until they could collect them, would be an incomparable relief to parents.

Versions of centres something like these already exist - and work - in several countries, but not as part of the everyday life of their communities, but as an expensive extra and only open to families in which children are at special risk of neglect or abuse. It is the very essence of a Children First centre that it will be available to everyone and answerable to all.

The family centre will be the obvious location for the local toy library; for children's book exhibitions and children's theatre; home base for a Home-Start team; a source of hands-on experience for adolescent parents-to-be taking child development courses in school; for students on childcare courses; future playgroup leaders and teachers; even a sensible place for antenatal and child health clinics.

Penelope believes that such centres serving the local area and employing local people could do a great deal to give communities back some sense of themselves as places where people live together and relate to one another.

## Penelope Leach

**“Penelope Leach is still, for my money, miles ahead of every other child care guru on the shelf”**

***Kate Saunders, She Magazine***

Penelope Leach, research psychologist and mother of two, is a favourite source of child development information and child care advice for parents all over the world, and a powerful advocate for the needs of families.

After a first degree in history at Cambridge University, a diploma in social work and then a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of London, she studied many aspects of child development and child-rearing under the auspices of the Medical Research Council.

With ten years of research behind her though, the births of her own children made her aware of the gulfs between theory and practice, professionals and parents, adults and children, and even men and women. Much of her subsequent work has been devoted to building bridges across these gulfs from both sides. Accordingly, she is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society, a Vice President of the Health Visitor's Association and past president and Chair of the Child Development Society, yet she also works for parents' and children's organizations concerned with antenatal education and birth, parental leave and family-friendly working practices, day care and early years education. She currently co-directs a programme of research into the effects of various forms and combinations of care on children's development from birth to school age.