



NORTH BUFFALO ROCKET

A Community Paper Serving the Entire North Buffalo Area and Central Park

CIRCULATION 13,500

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 23, 1974

277 TACOMA AVE.

North Buffalo day care center concentrates on non-ambulatory children; 'all can be helped'

by Georgia Mullen

The Developmental Day Care Center is unique in several respects, yet one is more apparent than any other—none of the 18 month to five-year-old children it cares for can walk.

Despite this condition, but more accurately because of it, the children are put through one hour of "strenuous" activity upon their arrival at the center, located in the Central Park Presbyterian Church, 15 Jewett Pkwy.

When I visited the center, staff members were working on "positioning" with the four children attending that day. Although they were all between two and three years old, two of them were learning to sit and pull themselves up. One little boy was being encouraged to take a step while a staff member held his hands.

All four children have cerebral palsy. All are mentally retarded. All need assistance in feeding. None are toilet trained.

"Mothers just don't think of school for children who can't feed themselves or aren't toilet trained," said Parnel Searl, founder and director of the day care center.

"I originally established this program for any child who was excluded from any other program," Mrs. Searl continued. But, since most of the applicants were non-ambulatory, she found that accepting children who could walk was too disruptive.

"We had one little boy whose problem was more emotional," she explained. His running around in a small area was not feasible to a staff working with other children who were basically stationary.

"It broke my heart to let him go," said Mrs. Searl. After exercising, the children paint. Last week they made Halloween pumpkins. With a staff member guiding a tiny hand, the child is thrilled to see a creation take shape, said Mrs. Searl. He experiences a sense of creativity and accomplishment, but also "there's the sensation of someone's hand on yours," she added.

Learning experiences continue as the children enjoy juice and crackers. The snack is varied to expose them to different textures and flavors and they especially like apple sauce. Snack time is followed by a nap.

At noon the children are transported home in the special bus which brought them that morning. Mrs. Searl is very pleased with Bailsey Transportation which she feels has gone out of its way to accommodate her pupils.

Mrs. Searl developed her program on the philosophy that there is "no child you can't do anything for. Every child can be helped and has potential."

In this vein, she feels it is "almost a pity" that her program does not have more applicants and that parents are not taking advantage of it.

"I think we have an excellent staff," said Mrs. Searl. With receipt of a federal grant and private donations she has been able to hire Sue Maiura, a certified teacher of the mentally retarded, besides buying needed equipment and supplies. (Some equipment, like cribs, belong to the church.)

Besides Sue, who plans an individual daily program for each child, the staff consists of Joyce Baer, assistant supervisor; Mary Wolf and Debbie Dendski, students in exceptional education at Buffalo State University College; and several volunteer high school girls from Mt. St. Joseph's Academy. Mary and Debbie are also volunteers.

Sue visits the home of each child every two weeks. "She knows the children so well and relates to the families so well," Mrs. Searl commented.

The staff, both paid and volunteer, visit other agencies for the handicapped once a month, and also participate in in-service workshops, the most recent one on handling emergency situations. Group meetings for mothers are held monthly and parties for the whole family are held throughout the year.

"We exist to help families cope with their kids at home," explained Mrs. Searl, who charges no fee for her program. It is funded entirely by the federal grant and private donations.

By taking children at 18 months (The staff also visits homes of infants too young for the program.) Mrs. Searl bridges the gap between the home and agencies for older handicapped children. She hopes that by getting them early she can help them develop as best they can. She then refers her children to other agencies when they become five years old.

Mrs. Searl, who has a master's degree in exceptional education, developed her program in 1971 for her own daughter and five other families. She believes hers is the only program of its kind in Western New York outside of those run by institutions.

"Our greatest need," declared Mrs. Searl, "is to contact families—make people aware our program is available.

People may be reluctant to apply because they don't realize their children can go to school."

She expects to expand the program in the near future, but said the expansion would involve establishing new centers, rather than enlarging present facilities. The staff-child ratio now is nearly 1-1.

To keep that ratio, Mrs. Searl is eager for more volunteers—especially men, since fathers are not generally as free during the day to participate in the program as extensively as mothers. Grandmother and grandfatherly-types would be most welcome, provided they could get around on the floor, since most work is done on floor mats.

The Developmental Day Care Center has three openings in its Monday-Wednesday-Friday class and several more in the Tuesday-Thursday group for a total capacity of 16 children.

Mrs. Searl stresses that the only requirement for acceptance into the program is that the child be non-ambulatory. Mrs. Parnel Searl can be contacted by calling 838-1568 or 833-8527.



LEARNING TO SIT...Mary Wolf practices sitting up with Patty.



CLEANING UP...Joyce Baer watches as Tommy cleans his table with a sponge after painting a Halloween pumpkin.



I LIKE APPLESAUCE...Unable to sit up herself, Suzie is held upright in a special chair while enjoying a snack.