Mi Hogar: A Summer School Children Love

What can an expanded day care program offer older students when they’re not in the classroom?
A vacation from the streets.

By Elaine Lee

To the unwary, a visit to the Madison Avenue Day Care Center in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, any early morning in summer would stimulate more adrenalin than a whole pot of coffee. At 7 A.M. one can see the beginning of the day’s activity that would not end until 6:30 P.M. Busloads of children, ranging in age from 3 to 14 years, arrive and eat a wholesome breakfast served in each of the five rooms. As the first children finish eating, others appear, and the tempo of activity steadily increases.

In the “Pink Panthers” room, a chess game is already in progress. Hosie and Sam are working on their treasure chests, and Angel, Torres, and Gerald have retreated to the “Quiet” room to tune up their combo. In another area, the “Cool Cats” are already dancing to recorded music, while Kathy and Illya are hovering over their latest copy of the center newspaper. The “Purple Lovers” are bundling papers from yesterday’s collection and loudly debating whether they should continue to save money for that big trip or spend what they have now on ice cream. Undisturbed by the 80 older children, the 35 preschoolers are already into their normal routines in two activity rooms located in the rear wing of the building.

There will be much more to come after these first activity periods. Each group is scheduled for art, team and individual sports, as well as an activity they select themselves. All groups have a full noon-meal at the center, or eat lunch on a picnic or cookout. Snacks are received later in the afternoon.

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A School Without Walls

The total area of the Mi Hogar center is not nearly sufficient to contain an active energetic group for any extended period of time. The summer expansion program is dependent on other space, most of it donated, for the development of a diversified day-camp program.

The local Salvation Army allows free use of an already vacated first floor for an art studio. Last year, one of the summer workers set up, furnished, and supplied the studio, planned the schedule of art activities, and supervised each of the three groups that attended daily for one to two hours.

Next door, the YMCA is used twice weekly for swimming instruction, ping-pong and pool for all groups. The YMCA auditorium, across the street, is used for film presentations. Two blocks away, the Simpson United Methodist Church offers their social hall for special events and rainy days.

Mi Hogar’s dependency on these and other locations make it truly a day camp “without walls.” The children are in the center for an average of only eight hours each week.