

# '66 Headstarters keeping busy

By Betsy Mahony



**CAN'T CHICKEN OUT** — Now, so away we go. Headstarters perform on the jungle gym-sliding board during outdoor play periods at the Lawrence Avenue School.



**BREAKFAST TIME** — Can't get steam up for a full day ahead without some goodies in the a.m. Miss June Thomas, assisting Mrs. Naomi Balukjian's Headstart group, supervises the cereal munching bunch.



**CLEAN UP SQUAD** — Everyone pitches in after breakfast to wash and dry cereal bowls. Cleanliness and responsibility are important qualities stressed with the youngsters, all between the ages of four and five.



**MESS TIME AGAIN** — Pre-schoolers gather in the cafeteria where teachers and assistants serve them lunch before the school-day ends.

It's been a long time since I've played "Duck, Duck, Goose" or "Farmer in the Dell," but that's what I found myself doing last Monday with a group of spontaneous youngsters — pre-schoolers attending Headstart 1966 at the Lawrence Avenue School.

Some of the shyer ones preferred to play with buddies they had made during their two weeks at school; others were still lured by the fascination of a tricycle or jungle gym. But, by and large they were an energetic, outgoing group showing little of the timidity characteristic of many a kindergartener experiencing anew friendships and "happenings" away from home.

From one morning back in a "Kindergarten situation," it would seem that Operation Headstart '66 will have as far reaching an effect as last summer's program, a project which in its maiden year saw positive results as the young participants successfully entered and completed regular sessions. End of the year tallies showed that the initial group had adjusted well and that more than half were ready to enter primary grades.

Two classes of 16 each under Mrs. Naomi Balukjian and Mrs. Fay Cambridge, assisted by Miss June Thomas, a junior at Plattsburgh State and Miss Cynthia Cook, an SUCP sophomore, have already felt the aura of "accomplishment." Only launched two weeks ago, their young charges have overcome the boundaries of "strangeness" and have made friends with classmates 14 days ago wholly unknown as well as finding trust and friendship in their teachers and assistants.

Two weeks of training in elementary health habits, table manners, and simple school-room discipline have already netted results noticeable in seemingly small measures: a well ordered double line quietly filling to play-time or lunch in the cafeteria; a young lady reminding her lunch-line partner after pre-meal washings: "Don't touch the walls — they're full of germs", an orderly procession to the sink to wash out cereal bowls used at breakfast.

A spirit of co-operation, so necessary with 16 four and five year-olds spending outdoor playtimes together is also noticeable. Sharing equipment without quibbles, opening group games to any one who might wish to participate, sharing blocks and books and dolls and paint and teacher's time many first-time experiences without question.

Goals set by teachers are already much in evidence. Stressing the individuality of each child, both teachers and their assistants are able to divide their time with each of their students, praising him, (cajoling him, sometimes, perhaps) in an effort to build up self-worth as well as instill a trust in the adults he will meet.

A full length mirror in one room (another is to be installed in the second) gives many of the youngsters another first — to see all of themselves from top to toe. It's a magical world with youngsters and mirrors — their mimicking and prancing at themselves must be much like their delight in being photographed; only a few shied away from the flash-bulb Monday.

Familiar now with the schedule, breakfast followed by clean up time, group activity (rhythm, stories, etc.) and outdoor play, the youngsters a/most willingly submit to their rest period. (Maybe a few heads popped up here and there.) Up from nap-time another group activity precedes washing for lunch; then the midday meal and another rest period and poems or a story. At 12:15 after a full day beginning at 8 a.m. the youngsters board the busses for home.

Nearly perfect attendance seems to indicate that even in their first two weeks both children and parents are enthused about the program. Field trips, slated to start perhaps next week, will give the students other first experiences: shopping at a local grocery store for a variety of fruits (a tasting party will follow the store visit giving the pre-schoolers an opportunity to recognize apples, cantelopes, bananas, oranges, berries and other seasonal fruits by taste as well as shape and color); a visit to the Massena airport where they will watch an airplane land as well as touring the plane's interior, something I have yet to see. After a visit to a farm and a local dairy bar where the pre-schoolers will watch milk being bottled, they will make ice-cream in class. Scheduled events include a picnic at the Seaway, and walking trips in the school neighborhood where other wonders — like steam shovels — will be witnessed.

While the children enjoy the marvels of discovering, their parents will be invited to weekly meetings thus projecting the child's school life into home. Invitations for parents to have lunch with the children, will be followed, it is expected, by talks with the cafeteria personnel in planning nutritious yet economic meals. Follow-ups in the fall, if the program falls into last year's pattern, will bring the parents again into contact with the school personnel in a series of medical and dental clinics.

Many things — not overtly present to the children, perhaps, are taking place in the background as well. "Music to rest by" includes familiar classic and semi-classic pieces, melodies being heard for the first time unobtrusively.

In the background also, are people with whom the children will have contact at future times: the dental hygienist, Mrs. Robin Wilkenson, building up familiarity by daily visits to the classrooms; the speech therapist, Mrs. Pat Gengo, visiting classrooms twice weekly thus becoming a familiar figure while on the look-out for those who might need help next year.

From the happy faces, the spirit of discovery, the retention evidenced in such simple things as discussing "Little Red Riding Hood" with one pupil, learning is indeed an enjoyable experience for these pre-schoolers.

New equipment and new experiences bring a sparkle and excitement not always present in children to whom such rudimentary possessions as crayons and paints and peg boards have become "old hat" at age five. "Operation Headstart" forges ahead again opening new vistas for the young — possibly the teachers — certainly anyone watching the world unfold for the little participants.



**PUZZLES, PEG BOARDS, & PAINTS** — With a little assistance from assistant Miss Cynthia Cook, one little fellow masters a picture puzzle while others work with peg boards and crayons under guidance of Mrs. Fay Cambridge.



**CLAP YOUR HANDS** — Music and rhythms led by Miss Cook are one of the group activities planned daily for the Headstarters. "Little Mr. Krupa" in the center seems to be missing a drum or two.



**THE LONG WAIT** — Marilyn Balukjian, volunteer help in her mother's class (Mrs. Cambridge's son Hank has volunteered in hers) and Miss Thomas assist the passengers on the playground slide.



**ALL DRESSED UP** — Two youngsters help themselves to costuming and props (a grocery cart) from the Doll's House, any little girl's dream — if she can cajole someone to play daddy.

## Hospital Expenses under

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## Milk over 19

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