

Albany, Georgia, Needs Nursery Schools

I went to Albany, Georgia, as a field worker for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee subsequent to graduation from college. One of the most startling conditions was the complete lack of child care facilities in the Negro community. There are no nursery schools, child care centers, parent cooperatives or kindergartens. And the majority of women in Albany work. As Mr. Slater King, President of the Albany Movement has said, "The older children are kept out of school to take care of the younger children.... Thus the vicious cycle continues, never stopping. Untrained, near illiterate children grow into adulthood with no employment and no hope, because they have had no training."

The child care center has the potential of being a significant and potent force in changing the historic pattern of sequestration. Older brothers and sisters could stay in school. It offers pre-school children the variety of experience necessary to create a positive transition from the home to the structured learning situation in school. This is a big transition for a five year old to make since the child is not used to sitting and listening for an extended period to someone in front of a room full of children. What happens so often is that a child starts school, and because of his lack of learning experiences, his attention span is short. He is used to responding to short commands and directions at home, but in most cases he is not accustomed to listening to series of sentences and explanations. He has trouble concentrating, much of what the teacher says passes him by and school is consequently boring. This child is a potential drop-out.

The social, cognitive, and emotional growth which occurs during the first five years has a profound effect upon a child's ability to relate to future learning situations. If a child is exposed to a valuable child care experience, the tools for learning and the learning process are not as foreign to him--he is more ready to learn. If his start is successful, that is, if he has feelings of confidence and worth in himself, this will have a positive effect on his attitude in relation to his education and his feelings about himself.

After spending six months in Albany, Georgia, I went to Berkeley, California. I completed several courses in the field of child development at the University, was employed in a city child care center (Albany, California) and at the University of California Child Study Center Nursery School.

I have made plans to return to Albany this Fall to open an all day nursery school for the children of working mothers. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee has promised to back the project. However, they will not be able to fully support the nursery school center, and the amount of support will not be determined until an executive committee meeting is held later this Fall. Before leaving California a benefit was held for the Nursery School at which \$300 was raised. I have worked out a minimum budget of \$3800 for one year and a maximum or desired budget of \$7000--neither of these include salary. Included in these amounts are rent, food (children will be fed a nourishing meal), insurance, utilities, phone, supplies of paper, paint, clay, etc., books, basic outdoor and indoor equipment, and materials for building equipment. Broken down to the month this would mean a minimum of \$320 per month and a desired \$600 per month.

Because this is a non-profit, non-political, educational undertaking, I have been advised that I can receive tax exempt status and that contributions will be tax deductible.

This Fall Albany faced a court order to integrate at the first grade level. As a result, 21 Negro children entered a previously all white school. A pre-school experience would help to lessen the shock for children who attempt to meet this challenge in the future.

Educators are finally realizing that it is often too late to interest a child in learning at the first grade level, that good pre-school programs have to come. Experimental programs are being set up in Harlem and other northern ghettos. They must come to the South too.