

## After-School Program Offers Fun Alternative For 'Latch-Key' Kids

BY SUSAN USHER

No latch-key kids here. Parents whose youngsters are participating in the YWCA School-Mate Program at four local schools don't have to worry about who is minding the kids until they get home from work.

At Supply, Bolivia and Southport elementary schools and Lincoln Primary School, after-school care is available Monday through Friday from 2:30 p.m. until 6 p.m. in a first-time program offered by the Wilmington YWCA in cooperation with the Brunswick County Schools.

"They are going really well," said Shelley Ballard, YWCA coordinator for the programs.

A fifth site, at Union Primary, was closed due to lack of participation. It could be reopened if enough interest is expressed. "We know there is a need, but we have to have the families," she said.

In the cafeteria at Supply Elementary School one afternoon in mid-week, Jeffery Alcorn joins Arias Gray and Briana Barnhardt in adding a piece or two to a jigsaw puzzle.

At another table, Ashley Stevenson, Adam Thompson, Jarod Gray and Clesea Walley are working with colors under the tutelage of Debbie Lennon, site manager.

By herself at a third table, Lashonda Gray is trying to get her homework done.

All the youngsters are restless, anxious to get outside to the playground.

"We go here every day," said Jarod Gray. "We go outside and play soccer."

Well, at least that's what the big boys do. Some of the girls are drawing with chalk on the pavement, others are jumping rope or playing hopscotch.

It's all part of the package, says Lennon. "We have a multitude of activities. They play inside and outside games. We're going to have guest speakers and we're going to start showing videos about once a week, and we supervise homework."

"I think the parents are pleased and excited about the program," she said.

An average of 16 to 18 students participate each day in activities geared to their various ages and abilities.

Care is available as well on staff development and teacher days, when teachers report to school but students don't. The service isn't available over holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter, at least not now. That possibility is being explored, said Ballard. "We may try to find a site so we can cover holidays."

The YWCA is also looking into state licensure for the program, not because it is required, but because it will



### After School Scenes

In photo at left, while other students play around her, Lashonda Gray tries to finish her homework. Above, Elizabeth Roberson (center) serves as taste-tester for pretend cooks (from left) Tarah Walley, Michelle Darby and Teresa Earney. At right, Jeffery Alcorn, Arias Gray and Briana Barnhardt stop to add pieces to a jigsaw puzzle.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

open the program to families who qualify for subsidized childcare.

Participating families must pay a YWCA membership of \$15, a registration fee of \$30 that includes insurance coverage, then \$27 weekly or \$6.25 a day. Staff development half-days are \$7.50 and teacher workdays are \$13. These are called "fun days," and start at 7:30 a.m. with a full range of activities provided. The programs shut down promptly at 6 p.m.

Scholarships are available, with fees adjusted on a sliding scale basis.

Once a student is registered in the program, said Ballard, he or she can "drop in" as many afternoons as their parents choose each week. Parents are asked to call a day ahead for planning purposes.

Under the arrangement with the schools, the campuses provide space, such as the cafeteria, gym and playground. The YWCA provides its own materials and staffing and purchases snacks from the school cafeteria.

The program's a hit not only with parents, but with kids.

Jeffery Alcorn said he used to go to a cousin's house after school.

"I like this better," he said, "because it's fun."

### Wanted: Your Ideas

"Under the Sun" is a weekly feature about interesting people, places and activities in Brunswick County. If you have an idea for "Under the Sun," we want to hear it. Call either Lynn Carlson or Susan Usher at the *Beacon*, 754-6890, between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. weekdays.

# GRAND OPENING

Saturday, Oct. 24, 12-4 PM

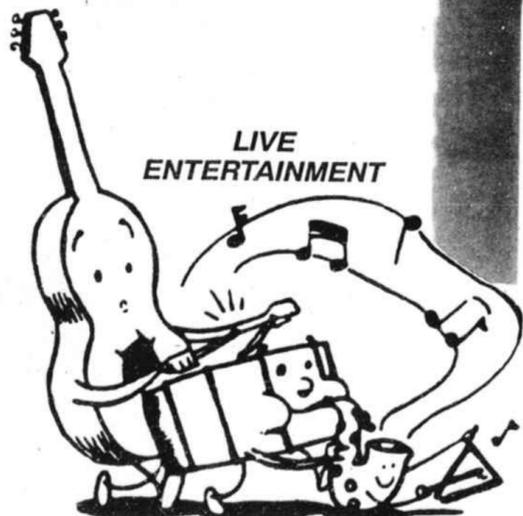
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