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OPERATION HEAD START, THE QUEENS BOROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAM FOR BOOKLESS HOMES.

Queens Borough Public Library, Jamaica, N.Y.

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The Queens Borough Public Library's picture book program, implemented in 1965 for children aged three to five years in disadvantaged areas of the Borough, is described in this report intended for the general public. Topics discussed include the background and planning of the program, parent programs, personnel, the "library of their own" project, program growth, and opinions of parents and educators. (JB)

OPERATION HEAD START

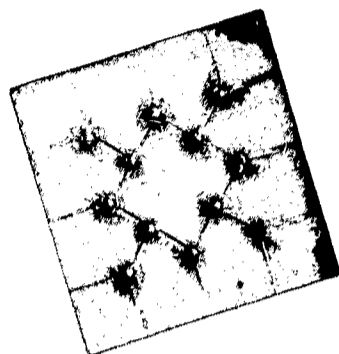
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The Queens Borough
Public Library Program
For Bookless Homes

Recipe

Take 1 library with a plan



Add some pillows



Next, some children



Stir
thoroughly

Photo 1: Queens Borough Public Library of course! Chief Librarian Harold Tucker is shown standing at left, Borough President Mario J. Cariello is at right.

Photo 2: The proper nomenclature is "Sit-Upon Cushions" and as of June 30, 1966, 5,297 Queens preschoolers had done just that!

Photo 3: Taken at the Library's St. Albans Branch, March 30, 1965.

Photo 4: Taken at the Library's North Beach Branch, April 23, 1965.

Result: OUTREACH!



THE OPERATION HEAD START STORY

The children

James Brown has decided to be a scientist. It wasn't always this way.

Time was when James Brown didn't know what he wanted to be.

Indeed, he got around to hearing there *were* scientists but a few weeks ago. And now, in just a month, the slender and alert looking boy with enormous round eyes will be in school and on his way to a career aimed, momentarily anyway, at astronomy. The school in question will be a kindergarten and its location will be in the Borough of Queens, City of New York.

Whether James, who is just four-and-a-half, sustains his current interest in science is not of very pressing concern to his folks and others who know him. They are content at this point with the mere fact that he has seen fit to confide his intentions (to a staff member of the Queens Borough Public Library) at all. Because, a short time ago, James was so uneasy and uncommunicative with people that he was confiding nothing. Little was known to anyone about his day-to-day thoughts, much less dreams.

James is one of 765 children from his neighborhood thus far to have been enrolled in OPERATION HEAD START, a bold program to bring the Library into the lives of preschoolers from "bookless homes" in a carefully selected ten of the borough's most culturally deprived areas.

The program's emphasis is on giving an equal reading readiness chance and a necessary social experience to children who otherwise would not have them. Though it preceded the federally devised and administered preschool programs of the current War on Poverty, it is both kindred and contributive to this national effort.

It is easy to see why the planners included South Jamaica—James' neighborhood—as one of the ten target areas. The Library through 52 branches serves as many borough communities. Of these, South Jamaica has one of the lowest median incomes; its unemployment average is nearly double that of the borough at large. Much of South Jamaica's population, 81.6 percent actually, is Negro. A 1964 compilation of ethnic spread of pupils showed that, in disproportion to their population, Negroes were able to account for only a twentieth of Queens' academic, and only a fifth of its vocational high school enrollments. James, who is a Negro, is living in more than a pocket of poverty. In the language of the Sixties, he is enmeshed in a milieu proved productive of cradle to grave socio-economic disadvantage.

Since 1964, when OPERATION HEAD START was begun, Library Aides have been canvassing South Jamaica for as many under five-year-old candidates as possible. One of them reached James' home and now he is attending OHS picture book story hours on a regular weekly basis.

Prior to his attendance, James had lived in an almost unpeopled world. He has a sister. But she is thirteen years his senior and when she is not in school, she, like James' mother, is out working. His father, who drives a taxicab, is absent from the house during most of the day. It was James' grandmother who eventually volunteered to bring him to the story hour sessions at South Jamaica Branch Library.

For awhile, it was impossible to know if this exposure to printed and pictured word was of any value—even recreational—to the boy. Despite the fact that his grandmother brought him to the building on time, he was customarily late in joining the group and in settling. Unlike the other children, who responded brightly to the little “finger plays” and songs which came between the story-tellings, and who inched their vinyl cushion seats as close to the Aide in charge as possible, he sat alone far to the back of the room and made no comments at all.

Then, one week his grandmother was not able to bring him to the hour. At home, James, who apparently knew very well what day it was, registered a marked disappointment.

Upon his return, the entrenched shyness began to disappear. He made two friends of his own age. Soon he began to arrive weekly at the story hour room with the two friends, and always on time.

At present, a South Jamaica Aide rates James as “extremely outgoing” and one who “participates thoroughly in story hours.”

His grandmother says he insists on wearing his best clothes for the sessions.

Mrs. Anna Strusser, the librarian in charge of the branch, reports: “Not only has he learned to work with other children and to take his turn, but he has also managed to develop an extensive vocabulary. He considers the library a friendly place to go, and on occasion will even express his sense of humor by imitating some of the duties that library personnel perform.”

James’ grandmother now has a borrower’s card, and, as in the case of his two companions, he takes books home every week to be read to him. Among his recent withdrawals, the records show, are *When I Go To The Moon* by Claudia Lewis, *How Far is Far* by Alvin R. Tresselt, and, of course, Carla Greene’s *I Want To Be A Scientist*.

The Children: Consuelo C.

Consuelo, who is three-and-a-half and from South America, lives near the Astoria Branch of the Library. The area, which borders the city’s East River, is in sharp contrast to its across-the-water midtown Manhattan counterpart. In both income and education Astoria is below the city averages. Its unemployment rate is perennially high.

Census figures indicate some 2,500 children of five years and younger now reside in Astoria. About ten percent of them are attending the Astoria Branch’s OPERATION HEAD START story hours. Consuelo is one of these, her mother having brought her to the library in December 1965.

“Consuelo is extremely shy,” Mrs. C. had cautioned the Astoria OHS Aide.

“That’s fine,” the Aide answered.

“Consuelo speaks only Spanish at home,” said Mrs. C.

“We see such children all the time,” replied the Aide.

“Consuelo is an only child and she lives in a place where there are no children to play with. This is her first experience,” explained the mother.

In nine months of greeting new children—children with every possible kind of background—the simple magic of the picture book and verbalized narrative had never significantly failed the Aide or her associates. She again assured the mother that everything would go smoothly and Consuelo was registered in Astoria's Tuesday morning hour.

Tuesday came and the assembled children were quickly captured by the lively unfolding of the first story, *Harvey The Dirty Dog*. But before the Aide could finish the book, Consuelo rose and ran out. When she reached her mother's arms she was crying hysterically. This was not an uncommon "first day" occurrence and the group waited until Consuelo was quieted and returned to their circle. For awhile she sat calmly. Then, again in tears, she bolted to her mother.

On the following Tuesday the same thing happened.

The third week, Mrs. C. was permitted to sit with her daughter. The other children were encouraged to make Consuelo as comfortable as possible. Consuelo was receptive to a point but still visibly fearful of being left without her mother. She cried twice during the hour.

The weeks began to pile up and still the fear of the group and occasional outbursts of tears persisted.

The mother was determined. "We will keep coming," she told the Aide. "I believe the child looks forward to it."

The woman's patience inspired the Astoria staff. They made what little extra efforts they could on the three-year-old's behalf.

Finally, after two months of Tuesdays, through sheer longevity Consuelo had adjusted to the point of accepting her presence at the library on the same basis as that of the other children. Her mother was no longer required to sit by her side. Consuelo was still far below the standard of attentiveness, however, and the storytellers suspected she was getting very little out of her attendance.

"It is only the language problem," said the mother. "I am sure she will learn to follow better."

The child did learn.

Today, after seven months in the OHS program, English-speaking Consuelo is cited by all who know her as a remarkably changed individual. When she arrives at the Branch she greets the staff with a happy "Hello." She sits on a cushion beside two old friends—also aged three-and-a-half—and engages in small conversation.

When the stories begin she is relaxed and rapt.

Sometimes she volunteers to lead certain of the day's finger plays and group songs.

When the hour is up she strides to the shelves and selects the titles she wishes to take home.

And, oh yes, she is especially kind to one of the Tuesday morning group's newest members, a three-year-old who for some reason is constantly interrupting things to run down the hall to his mother.

The Children: The Corona Kids

The Corona Branch of Queens Borough Public Library serves a neighborhood which has, geographically, two distinctly divided populations. One half of the community is

largely white and has many foreign-born. The other half is largely Negro. The white population segment is said to average 2.1 grades below the borough educational median, to have low income, and to be culturally deprived. The second segment is approximately 1 grade below borough educational median, has very low income, and is culturally deprived.

The 1960 Census suggests that approximately 3,000 five-year-olds and under reside in Corona. Of these, the OHS program at Corona Branch has to date reached cumulatively over 400. Frankie is one of them.

When Frankie joined a story hour group two months ago he spoke only Italian and did not participate in any activities. From the first moment, however, he has shown an unwavering high pleasure in the stories. "He loves to listen to them," his mother says, "and he likes the other boys and girls."

Lately, he has begun saying "Hello" and "Goodbye" and he is now taking part in the finger plays. He is also beginning to withdraw books and has a strong preference for those about ABC's. Because of Frankie's insistence that books taken home be read and re-read to him, the mother points out that she is now in the unique position of "learning English with him."

The progress of Suzie and Arthur, brother and sister enrollees in another of the Corona story hours, is paralleling that of Frankie. They are Chinese and they knew very little English a month ago. Their mother is so enthusiastic about the program that, were it permitted, she says she would bring Suzie and Arthur every day of the week.

Juan L. was a Corona "dropout." He had seemed first shy of, and then outright bored with the group. When he left, the Branch was afraid he was one child lost to the Library forever. Not long ago, however, he reappeared at the Corona building, at an hour when no stories were in session. As it turned out the timing didn't matter. His sole purpose in visiting was to tell an Aide about his trip to the zoo. The two had a nice chat. One thing led to another, and, well, now Juan's a happy reinstated story hour regular.

The Children: Sharon of Queensbridge

Among the neighborhoods served by the Queensbridge Branch of the Library is an East River pocket with the lowest median income in all Queens—44 percent below the borough average. Its educational median is a full 2 grades below that of the borough. A newspaper writer once referred to its adults and children alike as "unreachables." Whether the OHS Aides at Queensbridge read the reproach in question is not important. What matters is that they do reach—and retain—preschoolers there through the conducting of a goodly number of weekly programs in out-agencies.

It was at one of the December 1965 story hours given in a church that Sharon showed up.

Because of a disability, Sharon is unable to speak. To get her involved, the storyteller asked the four-year-old if she wouldn't like to turn the pages in the book for her. Sharon became so upset by this special attention she started to cry.

After coming to a few programs, Sharon was absent for a number of weeks. When she returned the storyteller greeted her warmly, not knowing whether such singling out would cause her to cry and possibly retreat again.

What the child did was to throw her arms around the Aide. Then she pointed to her barrettes and shoes and showed off her hat. "Sharon was now communicating in her way," says the Aide, "and we knew she was glad to be back."



**The
first
step**



The first step

The Queens Borough Public Library is an institution unusual in many ways, its character being imposed in part by the unorthodox geography of the borough and, certainly, by the admittedly also at times unorthodox methods of its staff.

Called (perhaps imprecisely) "an extension of Long Island," the Borough of Queens is bounded by water on three sides—Long Island Sound to the north, the East River to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south.

Comprising 118.6 square miles, Queens is by far the greatest of the New York City boroughs. Some idea of its massiveness can be gained by realization that along with the homes of its 2,000,000 residents the borough contains both of the city's commercial airfields, three of its colleges and universities, the majority of New York's most spacious recreation grounds (Shea Stadium, Forest Hills Tennis Club, Aqueduct Race Track, the World's Fair grounds, the long white swimming and fishing beaches of the Rockaways, et cetera), several military installations, and a large share of the city's manufacturing establishments.

The Library

In administering service to Queens the library utilizes 52 community Branches and a Central Library which recently moved into new quarters. In a survey of American public libraries released by the United States Office of Education in 1963, the Library's then reported 7,601,004 circulation was the *fifth* highest for the 121 systems surveyed. Currently, the annual circulation is 8,645,024, and the books loaned per registered borrower index is 14.26.

The extraordinary circulation figures are the products not of chance but rather of a dedicated approach of getting books in the hands of readers when and where they can use them. It is this spirit which has characterized the Library's OPERATION HEAD START program from the outset.

The Problem

From education, income, and employment data eventually made available by the 1960 U.S. Census, the Library was able to pinpoint information on people in certain parts

of the borough who were living under severe economic and cultural deprivation. The Census had permitted isolation of various borough "pockets" populated with sizeable percentages of foreign-born adults who could not speak English. Other areas were populated by percentages of functionally illiterate American-borns unable to write or read even to the fifth grade level. Particularly distressing to the Library were indications that in many of the homes parents were passing a cultural lag on to their children.

For some time, the Board of Education had been uncovering in all boroughs numbers of school-enterers with poor oral vocabularies and little or no reading readiness, children with such vague self-images that they were unmotivated and completely without goals. As a result, the city had been driven to establish both the "Higher Horizons" and "Tutorial School" programs. By 1963, in order "to counteract inadequate home environments," the Tutorial School programs were being held during afterschool hours and on Saturdays in 17 percent of the Queens elementary schools.

The Library wanted to make an action contribution toward lessening the adverse statistics, and it was felt that the answer might be in the formalization and expansion, on a selective neighborhood basis, of its extant picture book hour programs for pre-kindergarten children. That exposure to books and storytelling during preschool years has a lifelong beneficial influence was a view common among parents and librarians. Further, the view had been objectively substantiated by the 1963-released studies of Professor Dolores Durkin of Teachers College, Columbia University.

The Plan

By the end of 1963, Queens Borough Public Library had devised a plan. The program was a one-hour-a-week picture book session for three to five-year-olds which would entail first interest, and then involvement, of the parents. Small groups of children, preferably 15 to 20 at a sitting, would be shown picture books and told stories. After each reading the children would be permitted to talk about the story. At the end of each session, the librarian who had conducted it would assist the parent and child in picking out books to take home. Parents new to the program would be invited to attend special discussions and would be given individual help as needed—to improve their ability to guide their children from underprivileged beginnings to social, economic, and cultural equality with more advantaged population groups.

Among specific benefits possible to be derived from the program would be development of a child's ability to learn by listening (as opposed to the mere watching which television fosters). Reading readiness would be attained through development of the child's ability to use words (through talking about the stories). Broadening of his experiences and knowledge would come through the stories he heard, as would development of his imagination.

The Library's aim was to acquire personnel and materials sufficient to implement the new program in ten disadvantaged areas of the borough. Through Census figures it had been learned that over 20,000 three to five-year-old candidates were residing in the ten disadvantaged areas. In order to reach as many of them as possible schedules were projected for at least one (two if possible) story hours a day to be given five days a week, at each of the ten branches serving the areas. Also contemplated were additional story

hours in out-agencies such as churches, housing projects, and other likely sites.

It was soon clear the Library did not have the funds necessary for such an intensified program. An application for funds was made in the City Expense Budget but to no avail. Nonetheless, the administration continued to plan and strive for the funding necessary to implement "Operation Head Start," the name which had by then been given the program.

Careful studies were made of facilities in the ten Branches designated, and work on a list to strengthen the Library's children's picture book collection was begun. This and other work was completed when, in 1964, federal aid for libraries was expanded to include urban areas. The Library immediately applied for and in time received an initial grant of \$134,568 to develop an extensive program in those Queens communities where Census figures had proven poverty conditions. The funding, available through the Library Services and Construction Act, was to see the program through the period beginning December 9, 1964 and ending December 8, 1965. An interesting sidenote is that the funds predated federal Office of Economic Opportunity poverty program monies by some six months, making the Library's program a forerunner of the similarly named but quite different program to appear later, "Project Head Start."

Among the remaining matters to be worked out before the program could open its doors was the actual reaching and registration of the audience to which it was addressed. The parents of those who might benefit most from OPERATION HEAD START could not be counted on to hear about it through visits to the Library or even the reading of newspapers. Accordingly, a borough-wide community relations program was organized by the Chief Librarian. Welfare, education, service, and other agencies were contacted—with results. A core of enthusiasm was established and in many instances the Library would eventually be supplied with specific names and addresses of likely children.

The publicity campaign at the neighborhood level was spirited and effective. Branch Librarians saw to it that posters were put up in churches, stores, and laundromats. Flyers about the program were distributed to housing projects for insertion in tenant newsletters. News releases went to local newspapers, radio stations, and PTA chapters. Talks on the program were given to various local-level outlets. Finally, Library personnel approached people with small children on the street, to tell them the day and place of the picture book hour closest to them.

An OPERATION HEAD START implementing committee held the first of six meetings December 30, 1964. The necessary new staff was acquired and trained. In addition to regular training sessions (which included mock story readings and rehearsals of storytelling technique), the recruits listened to talks by invited noted experts on child development, parent education, and work with the underprivileged.

On March 3, 1965, with Regional Librarian Vesta K. Jones named Project Director, OPERATION HEAD START got underway in ten of the Queens Borough Public Library Branches: Astoria, Baisley Park, Corona, Dunton, North Beach, Queensbridge, Rockaway Beach, St. Albans, South Jamaica, and South Ozone Park. The number of story hours to be given each month had been carefully worked out. But the enrollment—315 children the first week—soon ballooned beyond both expectation and physical facilities. To meet the need, practically from the start, the programs were increased. Thus by the end of 1965, OPERATION HEAD START staff were giving 88 picture book story hours a week in the ten Branches and out-agencies and a total of 3,726 children had been registered in the program. By June 1966, the weekly total had climbed to 105 story hours and 5,088 children had been registered.

The parent programs



The parent programs

A popular and by now integral part of the OHS project are the programs for parents offered in the ten OHS Branches concurrently with the children's story hours. Not a few of the parents who bring their children to the Library are themselves getting a first insight to its possibilities as a lifelong means of self-education. These, along with the more knowledgeable parents, have expressed a steady stream of appreciation for being shown how they can use the Library to improve both their children's and their own lives.

Employing the discussion followed by questions format, the parent programs are attended one hour a week and are conducted Monday through Friday ten months of the year by Library Aides. The Aides are given special training for this assignment. Additionally, they receive continuing assistance in programing, as well as pamphlet material and films, from the Library's Programs and Services Department.

Compared to the volume of children's programs, parent programs were begun (in April 1965) in modest number. However, registration for them was quick to mushroom: In April 1965, 68 parent programs were given. By May, the number had tripled. Twice as many were given in June as had been given in May.

A 1966 survey taken among parents with children enrolled in OHS has established that almost 90 percent of them want parent programs. It has also provided the Library with subjects parents wish discussed. Heading the list are topics dealing with every phase of raising children. Next come such subjects as sewing, home decoration, current events, consumer education, and nutrition. Earlier programs had covered budgeting, health, safety, and children's emotions.

On occasion the parent programs are devoted to feature film showings of subjects of vital concern in family living, but the preference remains strong for the verbal presentation by Library Aide or outside expert followed by questions from the audience. Parent programs are ended with those in attendance being supplied with a reading list for further pursuit of a subject and—when pertinent, and possible—gift paperbacks and pamphlets. The use of pamphlets is especially heavy because the parents like their conciseness and they are inexpensive to secure in large quantities.

Favorable comments about the programs are many, with the majority being simple expressions of gratitude for the opportunity to meet and discuss similar problems with each other. More specific "thank you's" have run the gamut from the North Beach mother who confessed she had raised three children "without looking in a book," but had referred to *Your Child From 1 to 6* for help in dealing with her fourth child's tantrums "and found it worked!", to the South Jamaican who reported that the Library may actually have saved her life. The woman had begun reading books in earnest for the first time in years as a result of OHS. In a book dealing with health, something she read caused her to seek a medical examination. During the examination she was found to have a malignant breast tumor and it was speedily removed.

Perhaps the most reassuring compliment to the programs came during a week in June 1965 at Baisley Park Branch. As an Aide explained it in her regular report to the Project Director: "The mothers are carrying on lively discussions on the budget. Although there was no scheduled program for the week, they wanted to hold discussions of this subject."



The personnel

The personnel

When OPERATION HEAD START was first announced not a few people, including some members of his own staff, told Chief Librarian Tucker it simply couldn't be done. All the problems could conceivably be solved, they said, except one. And that would be personnel.

The original plan called for employment of 12 Children's Librarians, to conduct only picture book programs. After a year of operation, this core would be augmented by the recruiting of students and other nonprofessionals with appropriate background or interests who would be especially trained to serve as part-time assistants. Doubtless the plan would have worked were it not for the critical shortage of senior librarians. In early 1965, when the administration was attempting to staff OHS, the nation's public libraries alone were short an estimated 100,000 professionals.

The OHS plan was further complicated when the December 1965 implementing committee determined that to meet the size of the need already being indicated by the community, 14 *additional* positions would have to be created—and filled.

While the Library had four librarians on its own staff who had volunteered and been found acceptable for OHS, it was at a loss as to how to fill the majority of the vacancies. The recruiting problem was discussed at length. Finally, rather than wait for the number of trained senior-level librarians necessary, the administration decided to put its second-year plan into effect immediately. The bulk of the OHS personnel would be made up of nonprofessional aides recruited on a catch-as-catch-can basis. Once this somewhat brash decision was made, the Library never had cause to regret it.

Today, under the direction of Regional Librarian Jones and her assistant, Evelyn Hall, and under the further guidance of ten Branch Librarians and four strategically located Children's Librarians, OPERATION HEAD START is functioning smoothly with an immediate staff made up entirely of nonprofessionals. These are the 40 "OHS Library Aides," each of whom works but 20 hours a week (10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday).

All Aides must be college graduates or at least in the third year of matriculation for a degree. Their pay scale is as follows:

- Juniors and seniors in college, \$2.48 hr. (\$9.92 per day)
- Holders of undergraduate degrees, \$2.60 hr. (\$10.40 per day)
- Matriculating for graduate degree, with eight credits, \$3.46 hr. \$13.84 per day)
- Matriculating for graduate degree, with 18 credits, \$3.63 hr. (\$14.52 per day).

Despite the brief and unusual hours, Mrs. Naomi Thorne, the Library's Employment Manager, says she has little trouble finding Aides. Some of them are housewives who

don't mind the 10-to-2 schedule, but the majority are male and female evening students Mrs. Thorne culls from the colleges and universities of Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. "I tell the placement officers," she says, "that we are interested in the student now preparing himself to work with young people, particularly the very young child who is from culturally disadvantaged groups." Accordingly, most of the students hired are sociology, child psychology, and early childhood education majors.

Training

When an Aide is hired he or she is put through an intensive two-week OHS training period. In the early days the Aides were trained in classes at the Central Library, where such subjects as psychology of learning for three-to-five olds, book selection with stress on picture books, presentation of story hours, audio-visual techniques, parent programs, introduction to branch work, and techniques of canvassing were covered. From these classes, and ensuing trial and error experience, the Library was subsequently able to compile a valuable manual on the training of Aides.

Today, new Aides are given training not in classes but on the job in one of the four OHS Branch Libraries where a Children's Librarian is available to supervise their progress. During this two-week period theory is minimized in favor of learning by doing. When the two weeks are completed the new Aide is assigned to permanent duty at one of the ten OHS Branches and is on his own.

If the Aide's day is short in hours it is long in activity. The main job is of course to conduct picture book hours and parent programs. But Aides must also keep accurate records of registration, attendance, and books circulated after each of the day's children's and adult programs. Still another of their activities is canvassing for new registrants.

Canvassing

Canvassing is done by placing posters and publicity leaflets with neighborhood outlets and by talking about the program to virtually any groups or individuals who will listen.

Aides visit local welfare, health, and family agencies to spread the word about story hours and to ask those who are in position to know for the names of likely children. They seek out the churches, including the small ones often unlisted in phone books. They call at nursery school and day-care centers and tell the directors: "Let us accommodate the children on your waiting lists." They appear at municipal playgrounds and approach adults in the company of small children with OHS literature in hand. Lastly, to reach "the severely removed," they go out and knock on doors.

Not surprisingly, more often than not their story hour sessions have more children present than were planned for.

Among OHS's most indefatigable canvassers would be Baisley Park Branch's Dominick Bluni and South Ozone's Joan Smith. Mr. Bluni, 22, is a Brooklyn resident and a sociology major at Queens College. He joined the staff in February 1966 and already has formed a pet philosophy of canvassing:

"Go to the source—the kids. You can do anything with kids. For the most part people are cooperative and only few will be nasty. But warming up to the kids is the answer. When the parents see their children responding to an Aide they sit down and listen. Then they welcome the publicity leaflets."

Mrs. Smith is a married mother who took her masters degree in sociology in 1949. She has been an Aide since May 1965. "We usually canvass when we're setting up a new program such as an out-agency," she explains. "It's important to reach the children because so many of them in our community are deficient in vocabulary and speech. You meet parents who are ignorant and apathetic. Still, the children can be reached."

During a canvassing morning in 1965, Mrs. Smith found a house where one woman was caring for a grandchild, three nieces, the children of both her cousin and a neighbor, and two infants of her own. Several of the children were OHS eligibles and Mrs. Smith duly secured the woman's promise to bring them to a Monday story hour. The day came and the mother didn't appear. Mrs. Smith phoned her and learned that she could not get out because one of the children was only six months old. Mrs. Smith didn't give up. She tucked a picture book under her arm and went back to the house. Setting up a chair in the backyard and assembling the children around her, she began to read. When she left she had the assurance of the mother that the eldest of the children, a 13-year-old girl, would be bringing the younger children to South Ozone story hours. During the entire summer the girl and the children never missed a week.

Converts to Librarianship

An interesting byproduct of OPERATION HEAD START is the Aide who, after working a few months with the program, decides to make library science a profession.

One of the "converts" in question is Mrs. Selma Myers, a Forest Hills, Queens, housewife and mother of three teenage children. Her husband is an electrical engineer and Mrs. Myers' own bachelor's degree had been in geology.

"With the children at school, I decided I wanted something to occupy myself for a few hours a day," she says.

Someone told Mrs. Myers the Library was looking for part-time personnel and she went to see about it. In October 1965, she was appointed to begin training at the OHS Astoria Branch and two weeks later she was giving story hours and parent programs at Corona Branch.

She quickly grew to like the work ("It was a good feeling, seeing how the branch library can really serve the community."), and after several months on the job she

decided she wanted to be a librarian full-time. Recently her application was accepted as a student at Pratt Institute's Graduate Library School.

So now Selma Myers, who had been looking for something to occupy her "for a few hours a day," is going to be spending the next 30 months working hard toward a Master of Library Science degree. It will take 30 months because of her family obligations and the fact that she is also spending eight hours a week as a Librarian Trainee in the Science and Technology section of the Central Library.

Mrs. Myers is unique but not alone. At last count there were two other OHS housewives with children who have decided to go back to class in search of library science degrees. And the switching of majors among the younger Aides still in undergraduate schools is more numerous.

The "Rewards"

The salary of the Aide is certainly not the world's most attractive. By way of over-compensation, however, it must be noted that working with the tiniest tots of all does offer some rewards of its own. These can vary—from the Christmas present given an Astoria Aide by the children of some grateful parents, to the January 1966 afternoon when, apropos of nothing, a Queensbridge storyteller was up and kissed by all assembled.

The files at Project Director Jones' office are filled with little moments such as these. They have been appended, usually in a hasty hand, at the end of the Aides' regular monthly reports.

Here are some of Miss Jones' favorites:

ASTORIA—"Suddenly all of the children have changed their name to 'Batman,' and will not respond to their real names. 'Robin.'"

ROCKAWAY BEACH—"One of the mothers reports the A&P store manager has 'volunteered' to put a leaflet in every shopping bag!"

CORONA—"A grandfather approached me in a luncheonette and said, 'Are you Miss Rigano? Adrian has been removing all the chairs in my kitchen and making it look like a library. The other day I heard her say, Now, children, Miss Rigano told you to raise your hands before speaking.'"

QUEENSBRIDGE—"Mrs. Skirball did a program on night, and after completing a very soothing story about sleeping looked out to discover some of her listeners—sleeping."

NORTH BEACH—"A quiet little girl being temporarily cared for by an aunt came to her first picture book hour. After the program Mrs. Gold invited her to join the Library so she and the child might take some books home. The aunt said she would do it some other time. The child clutched a favorite book to her chest and wouldn't put it back. Auntie relented and took out a library card then and there."

QUEENSBIDGE—"After an out-program where I gave three stories the children just sat still, saying nothing. Finally, one of them asked, 'Haven't you got any more stories?' Then, another one came up and gave me a hug and a kiss. A third invited me to join the group in their snack of milk and cookies."

ST. ALBANS—"The program was almost over. We had had our fingerplay and I was introducing the last book. I told them it was a rather long story about a rather long dog (*Lengthy*), and that I wanted them to be very comfortable because I did not want them to miss any part of this very interesting story about a very unusual dog. Everyone settled back and I was about to begin when a child got up and tugged at my sleeve, the way the very little ones do when they want your attention. She whispered in my ear: 'I'm going to suck my thumb for this one.' Then she went back to her cushion and sat down."

NORTH BEACH—"When story hour was done a little boy walked over to Mr. Napolitano and asked, 'Are you a boy or a kid or a man or what?'"



A library of their own



A library of their own

The Library's periodic gifts of paperbacks to children have proven to be one of the most valuable aspects of the OPERATION HEAD START program. Aides have found that the practice encourages the beginning of home libraries in homes where previously there were none.

By the end of January 1966, 5,300 paperback picture books had been given out to OPERATION HEAD START children. The titles involved—all proven favorites among the youngsters—were *Barney's Adventure*, *Caps for Sale*, *Curious George*, *Curious George Takes a Job*, *The Five Chinese Brothers*, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, *I Can't Said the Ant*, *Little Indian Two Feet*, *Story of Ferdinand*, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, *Twelve Days of Christmas*, and *What Do You Say, Dear*.

Presentation of the books is with a planned frequency and an attempt is made to tie in the presentation with special events such as National Library Week, Children's Book Week, and Christmas. There is a distinct aura of formality attendant the presentations and this is induced by the children themselves. Breaths are hushed when the Aides write their names in the books, and they listen solemnly to the explanations of why it is nice to have one's own "library."

Following is a copy of the guidelines recommended to Aides for the presentation of a paperback to children attending picture book programs in the third week of April 1966.

"Ceremony: Gift book—*Harold and the Purple Crayon*

"At the end of the formal story hour show the book, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, to the children.

"Ask them if they know the little boy in the story. What is his name?

"Ask what he does in the book.

"Tell the children that because they like the story so much you are going to give them a book to keep. To take home.

"Ask them where they keep their books at home.

"Suggest good places to keep books.

"Tell the children the books belong to them and so their names must be written in them.

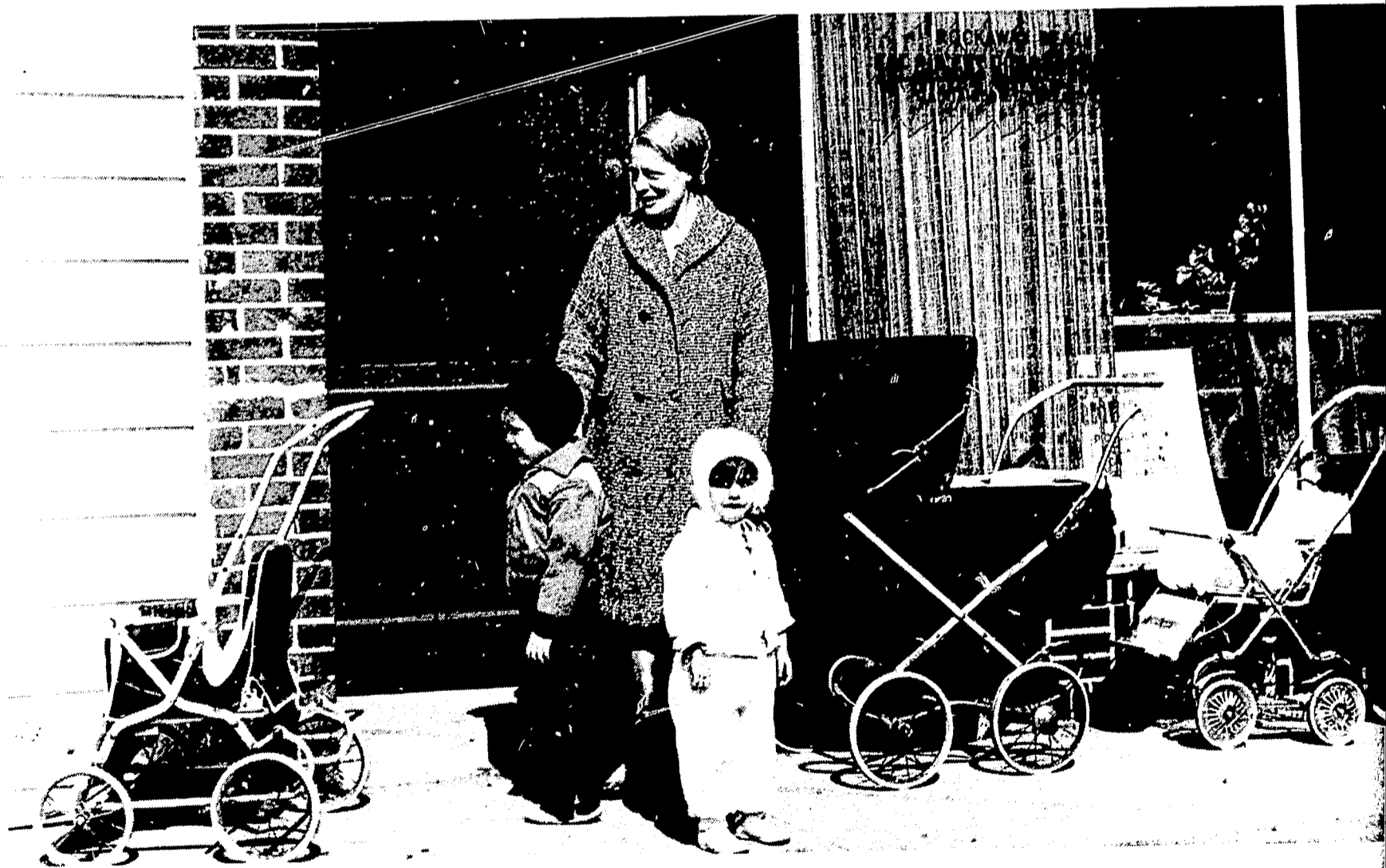
"Line the children in front of you and write the first name of each child in purple crayon or pencil."

Aides sometimes suggest during a gift presentation that children ask for a book when someone inquires what things they would like for a birthday or for Christmas. Parents, too—especially those new to the program—are tactfully encouraged to make inexpensive contributions to the child's library. They are reminded that such modest "investments" are bound to pay bigger and bigger dividends as the years go by!

**A good idea
just grows**



and grows



and grows

A good idea just grows and grows and grows

One fine spring day in 1965 a pretty St. Albans mother beamed and avowed to a librarian that OHS was "a real one-of-a-kind commodity." OHS is that, of course. But with equal accuracy (if less poetry), the woman might also have noted that it is a *growth* commodity.

The statistics covering *every* OHS activity keep mounting and mounting—from the purchase of tan and turquoise "Sit-Upons" to postal cards mailed, from adults' after-program use of reference resources to canvassing quotas completed.

Periodically, a number of the children registered reach school age and automatically withdraw from the program. Withal, the total number of children attending story hours gets larger and larger. The mothers of the school-agers "graduate" with them. Yet the number of one-hour parent programs required weekly holds firm, or edges upward; it seldom shrinks. Book circulation, traceable to both programs, continues to climb and climb!

Growth by Programs

Following is a sampling of monthly statistics which reveal the steady growth maintained in OHS one-hour children and parent sessions throughout the program's initial 16 months of operation (March 3, 1965 to June 30, 1966).

Number of parent programs given during month: April 45; May 131; June 192; November 220; June (1966) 280.

Number of story hours given during month: March 111; April 185; May 199; June 249; November 290; May (1966) 424; June (1966) 443.

Commensurate with the increases in individual OHS programs given, naturally, have been increased attendance totals. The weekly figures following show the size and pace of attendance growth in OHS's first 16 months.

Average number of parents attending programs each week: April 1965, 228; June 1965, 444; May 1966, 474.

Average number of children attending story hours each week: March 1965, 402; April 1965, 729; December 1965, 965; June 1966, 1,377.

Growth of Circulation

Records are kept on after-program book borrowing in the ten OHS Branches as this is a means for measurement of OHS effectiveness. From March 1965 through May 1966, this circulation totaled 106,672 books (92,209 juvenile and 14,463 adult). Within the month

of May 1966 alone, the after-program circulation soared to a giddy 9,642 titles. This, at a time when the general trend in the rest of the system, as well as in the country, is pointing in an opposite direction!

Others Want to Know

One indication that the OHS idea was sound was the amount of word-to-mouth enthusiasm it generated in the world at large dating from its infancy stages.

From the first month of story hours, the Library has received a steady flow of letters from librarians, state education officials, elementary school reading specialists, and others desiring information on the program. In some cases the OHS story hour and OHS parent programs training manuals are requested and in other instances it is the OHS booklist. Many of the letters simply ask: "How do we start our own OHS?"

While no precise records of inquiries are kept, following is a list of some of those requesting information in 1965:

Columbia University School of Library Service; Kent State University Department of Library Science; Ridley Township (Pa.) Junior High School; The Agricultural & Technical College of North Carolina; Public Library of Newark (N.J.); Department of Library Science, West Virginia University; Moorestown (N.J.) Free Library; Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (Pa.); Queens County (N.Y.) Catholic Charities; Orange Center (Calif.) Elementary School District; Adriance Memorial Library of Poughkeepsie (N.Y.); Project Head Start of New York, Archdiocesan Opportunity Program (Detroit, Mich.); University Settlement (N.Y., N.Y.); Library of University of East Africa (Nairobi, Kenya);

The Dial Press, Inc. (N.Y., N.Y.); School of Library Service, Atlanta University; Education Editor, New York Times; The Library Journal Magazine; Free Library of Philadelphia; Memphis (Tenn.) Public Library; United States Office of Education (Washington, D.C.); American Association of University Women;

The Economic Opportunity Committee (N.Y., N.Y.); State of Florida Department of Education; Curriculum Center, New York City Board of Education; Institute for Disadvantaged Youth (Flushing, N.Y.); Cold Spring Harbor (N.Y.) Schools; Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary School (N.Y., N.Y.); St. Pascal Convent (N.Y., N.Y.); Children's Literature Department, Hofstra University.

Inquiries Are Welcome

The basic procedures developed by Queens Borough Public Library to implement and maintain OHS have been demonstrated applicable to conditions in various types of culturally deprived urban communities. Procedures gradually evolved to overcome such

obstacles as staffing, training, publicity, and programing can be modified to fit local conditions in other cities, and the Library will continue to help as best it can those agencies who inquire into them.



What do parents think?



What do parents think?

Parents whose children attend OHS story hours frequently make comments about the program to Aides, Branch Librarians, and other staff members. Some of them go a step further and, using the note paper available at the OHS branches, write the Library a letter. The grammar and the spelling are not always Sunday best. But this does not diminish the Library's pleasure in receiving the comments, each one of which is duly read and filed.

Following is a sampling of the written parents' comments:

"It has helped my child because it gave him an opportunity to be with new children his own age. Although he plays very well with the children he knows, he did not want to stay the first few weeks because he did not know everyone else. Now he comes very willingly and I think I've saved us both some problems when he starts kindergarten in the fall."

"Evyan looks forward to visiting the library and is very proud to talk about it. She has begun to tell stories of her own and sings the new songs she learns."

"This program has helped my boy Joseph Perry very much. He love it so much that he keeps asking me when is Monday so he will be able to come to the story hour."

"The children are Korean, as you know, and I thank you for giving them the opportunity to verbalize."

"He sits and listens better than he did. He is interested in books."

"The child won't tear books now. He wants to keep all the pages in the book so other children can read the story and not be left without knowing what happened."

"I brought my boy to some programs while my wife was expecting a baby. I am spending more time with him now and answer questions asked by him."

"They take the pillows off the couch and put them on the floor. Kitty takes a library book, sits on the pillow, and tells Michael the story."

"Joseph is learning songs and finger games that his sister is just now learning in school."

"My son, very shy, is beginning to come out of it. At home he talks a lot about what he does in the library."

"My only complaint: The program should be longer than an hour."

"He has overcome his fear of being in a group as a result of coming to story hour."

"I think if my six-year-old had had the program, maybe he would be like my three-year-old, who wants stories read to him at home and has developed the ability to sit quietly."

"He refuses to go to the nursery but he looks forward to coming to the library."

THIS PROGRAM HAS TAKEN MY CARE OF BOOKS. I THINK IT IS VERY GOOD. AND
 HER PREVIOUS ACUTE SHYNESS. I HAVE SET THEM INTERESTED
 IT HAS GIVEN HER AN INTEREST IN BOOKS. LEARNING
 SCHOOL WILL BE LIKE WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE. SHE HAS LEARNED MANY THINGS.
 SHE HAS GAINED RESPECT FOR BOOKS.

My child always enjoyed reading. This class has

This program has helped my daughter Sharone to all
 satisfy her eagerness to "Go to school" he's
 to have a teacher she can call "My teacher" (him)
 as she misses her older sister. ~~which goes~~
~~to school~~ and enjoys her going to school. ship of
 she learned to read more attentively. y she and
 ay, he seems
 the children

think this library group has a lot to offer. Mrs. Batra, I've been
 to play and talk with them. They do get a lot of play.
 I've been sitting and looking at all books with
 pictures in. Instead of ripping our books up
 keeps them nice & puts them away. She
 a little better with other children
 tops much better.

My child to go to school. I think it is true
 being able to get an interest.
 Children. She has more interest
 now.

Dear Mr. Harold Zucker.
 I have little girl 3 year old
 3 yr. old January 7, 1965
 like to read for my daughter
 she

He is interested in books & enjoys
 listening to stories that are read to him.
 He is looking forward to going to Elementary school
 He wants to learn.

"They have become more interested in books. The smallest has learned not to be so noisy."

"Yes, it helped Michelle Martine much. She has more patience to listen."

"The program has helped to prepare my child for kindergarten in that he is now more able to accept authority. The 'show and tell' period is excellent because he is very eager to get up and show the other children, and express himself."

"I find the program helps the children in more ways that could really be seen. The love for books and the pride they take in getting ready to get to the program and telling later the rest of the family about it is just wonderful."

"I do think this library story hour has helped this age group because they get a chance to play and talk with others that are the same size and age. Ellen has two older brothers and sometimes they either get very impatient with her or to the other extreme they let her have her own way."

"The child asks me each day, 'How many days until Tuesday?'"

"I appreciate having my child talk to other children, as he is in a shell of his own."

"He is now interested in having me read stories to him. He is now very anxious to go to school."

"It has prepared him for school by giving him the chance to know that there is a teacher who is in charge and that also the teacher is interested in showing him new things."

"The program has enabled my daughter to leave me without crying which will be a big help when she starts school."

"He is interested in books and enjoys listening to stories read to him. He is looking forward to elementary school."

"They can't wait to get here!"

What do educators think?



What do educators think?

"We are not teaching reading" is an opening line frequently used in Assistant Chief Librarian Mildred Hennessy's talks to new OHS Aides. The distinction is important in this era of educationalist arguments about whether the three- and four-year-old ought to be taught to read, and, indeed, if he *can* be so taught.

The Library's concern is not with teaching reading but in providing readiness for it and for school in general. To this end, it should be mentioned that OHS Aides and parents observe that story hour participants in time show improved ability to verbalize, that they are able to answer questions about the stories they hear and can discuss the sequence of events in them, that they develop reasoning ability to the point of speaking in whole sentences, and that they are relaxed in the Library without their mothers.

The Library has been guided in its aims and scope by both the remarks and research of contemporary educators. Professor Dolores Durkin, the noted reading specialist at Teachers College, Columbia University, has been one such "guide." Dr. Durkin's celebrated Oakland, California and New York City surveys, and her subsequent studies, have led her to emphasize that the parent and others interested in his advancement can most effectively help the preschool child by reading to him, stimulating his curiosity about the written and printed word, and patiently answering his questions.

The OHS planners were encouraged by observations on the school dropout made by Francis Keppel when he served as U.S. Commissioner of Education. Dr. Keppel believes that in many cases the dropout's trouble begins markedly early in life, that there are damaging circumstances which can so engulf very young children that they are almost irretrievably handicapped before they enter even elementary school, and that in such instances the finest school facilities may prove of little avail.

While Dr. Keppel has always stood in favor of remedial tutoring in after-school hours, he has gone on record as being equally in favor of acquainting underprivileged children with the word-learning process at ages three to five. In this he has been supported by the Office of Education's preschool training specialist, Dr. Lillian Gore.

The Library could not but be impressed with Governor George Romney's account of the campaign to lift up Detroit's schools, in which illiterate parents were urged to provide an example for their children by sitting home at night and slowly turning the pages of books they could not read.

Finally, the Library has noted with especial interest the May 1966 proposal of the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association that free public schooling at the age of four be made available to all children.

The *New York Times* Education Editor, in an abridgement of the NEA recommendation, recently stated, "The purpose is not to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to the four-year-olds, but rather to promote a better understanding of the spoken word and better reactions to other children, and to provide an earlier chance to share experience and give up the extreme egomania of the untutored child." The similarity between this summary of purpose (of a proposal which still other education editors have acclaimed as "avant") and the 1964-stated aims of OHS is gratifyingly striking.



The need to continue

Queens Borough Public Library's OPERATION HEAD START was created in 1964 as a year-round program "to provide social adjustment and learning preparation for pre-schoolers to enter society and school, and to orient them and their parents to the self-education possibilities of the library."

The immediate objective had been to extend the opportunities of the program to as many adults and children as possible within the federally designated ten most poverty afflicted areas of Queens. At this writing the objective remains unmodified.

The combined populations of the ten areas is 261,572 with children under five years old numbering 27,060. The areas, and their children-under-five populations, are:

Astoria (2,546); Baisley Park (1,545); Corona (3,091); Dunton (2,247); North Beach (3,205); Queensbridge (2,340); Rockaway Beach (1,885); St. Albans (3,170); South Jamaica (3,317); and South Ozone Park (3,714).

As has been shown, OPERATION HEAD START has managed to benefit over 5,000 children and an appreciable number of parents. Still, it cannot be argued that conditions have significantly changed in the cited communities.

- Their median family income is still well below borough median.
- Their educational levels remain generally two grades below borough median.
- Their average unemployment rate hovers at 4.4 percent, which is 68 percent greater than borough rate.

Their need of OHS as a handhold to more steady ground, then, is as dramatic as ever.

The previously discussed National Education Association recommendation that free public school at the age of four be made available to all is a powerful argument indeed. At present, 3.4 million of the country's 8.4 million children in the four-to-five bracket are *already* enjoying the privilege of some form of public or private education. The breakdowns show: 4.3 percent of all three-year-olds and 14.9 percent of all four-year-olds are enrolled in some public or private educational program, with 58.1 percent of all five-year-olds in kindergarten and 11.1 percent of them in first grade.



These startling figures indicate clearly a change in United States early childhood education structures. They tell us that more and more children are arriving at their schools with more and more preparation. They also tell those who will hear that the economically and culturally disadvantaged child's leap to equalness, his jump to bridge the gap, now must be stronger and surer than ever. Certainly this child should not be consigned to a substandard success in school and in life. That is what OHS has been all about—and what it wants to continue to be all about.

The program at this time can be classified as no less ongoing than people themselves. And the Library has made a vital community commitment to provide it as long as some of those people need a learning head start.

*OPERATION HEAD START □ A report by W. B. Bennett □ On the program
originated and conducted by the Queens Borough Public Library, Queens,
New York □ Harold Tucker Chief Librarian, Mildred Hennessy Assistant
Chief Librarian □ Published by Queens Borough Public Library, 89-11 Merrick
Boulevard, Jamaica, Queens, N.Y. 11432 □ 1966*



OUTREACH . . .



**Through Queens Borough Public Library's
OPERATION HEAD START!**

