

Kids' center is happy place

By CANDACE KNIGHT

A working mother in the mid-county area has little choice for child care. Many mothers, due to the high cost of babysitters and private day care centers leave their children with older brothers and sisters, or alone.

Live Oak Children's Center, located at Live Oak School, is one solution to a working parent's problem. It is a day care providing after school and summer facilities with fees based on family income.

Parental peace of mind seems to be a close second to having a place to put one's child. Karen Wentworth whose son is in the program, said of Live Oak daycare, "I personally don't know where I'd take him to get the attention and care he gets from Live Oak."

Carol Jones, who has a daughter in day care added, "She keeps learning here. She loves to come, I don't have any squabbles in the morning. It's close to our home, so convenient. I 'catch it' from her on the days she doesn't come. I don't worry about her when she's here; Rhonda really feels at home."

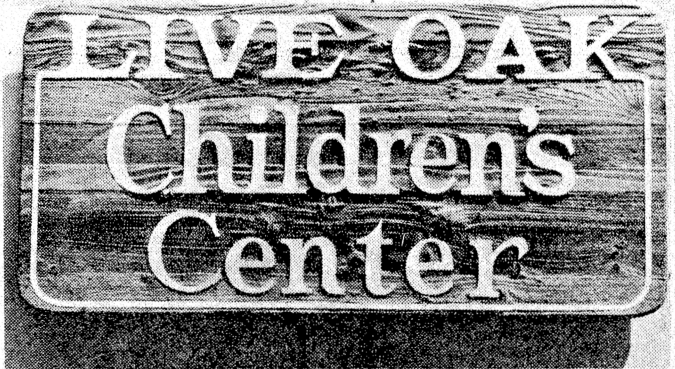
Live Oak houses about 20 children during the summer months, most of them on a full-time basis, according to Stella Moreno, daycare instructor. Children range in age from 4 to 11, and are from families of all income levels. Virtually all are at daycare be-

cause their parents work. "I don't think we have anybody strictly on welfare," Miss Moreno noted, "but there are a lot of kids from single parent families."

The center is operated in two portable classrooms on the Live Oak campus. It is open at 7:30 a.m., and closes at 6 p.m. During the summer months there are two full time instructors, Linda Campbell, assistant director in charge of daycare, and Miss Moreno. There is one summer aide provided by the Youth Employment Service. Miss Moreno stated that the child-teacher ratio at any given time is about 1-7. She said she was satisfied with this ratio, a smaller would tend to make the teacher the center of attraction, rather than the kids.

Amy McKenna, whose son Eddie attends daycare, felt the staff members are well suited to their positions. "I really like Linda, she's very intelligent and has good aptitude for kids. I've seen positive results with Eddie because of her program." Another parent stated, "My son thinks the sun rises and sets on Stella."

A daily schedule is followed. Activities range in length from 15 minutes to an hour or more. Structured happenings (arts and crafts, woodwork, games) are conducted along with a free activity so that all children are occupied in one way or another.



Time is always allotted for resting and stories.

Equipment is available for outdoor games, but, Miss Moreno said, children are not forced into participation. "We never say, 'Now were all gonna play kickball, understand?'" Children seem to find favorite activities when they're outdoors, so that a teacher-conducted activity is rarely necessary. As teachers, she explained, they often will start a game, then phase out and allow the children to play together and conduct their own event.

Two times a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, the group takes a trip to Capitola beach. The outing lasts from 10:45 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., and includes a picnic lunch. Parents, if they have the opportunity, are invited to attend.

Parental support, according to Miss Moreno, runs high, however parental participation in daycare

activities is limited since most parents are at work during daycare hours. Parents, are kept up on the activities, progress, and discipline of their children through frequent conversations with the instructors.

Discipline, noted Miss Campbell is for the safety and well being of others. "We deal in positive terms, positive statements. We challenge the kids to think about their problems and tell us what rule they broke, and why," added Miss Moreno.

Both teachers said they think of themselves as resources, not strict authoritarians. "Kids must learn to own their own mistakes," explained Miss Moreno. "We feel success breeds success." Discipline that can tend to devastate children (ridicule, demerit system, corporal punishment) is never administered.

"The kids know the rules, and for the most part, we have very few discipline problems. A couple of kids we have to sit down on more often, but the consequences are the same for everyone. We're as fair as fair can be," she stated.

New children usually take a few days to adjust. Children who are going into kindergarten are accepted on a trial basis. Age and size makes a difference, and the young ones are generally the shy ones. The older children tend to mother the little ones, rather than bully them.

When asked how teachers handle a new child, Miss Campbell laughed and said, "We let 'em hang out with us!" Children new to the program are introduced by the teacher to the others through games and other social situations. The teacher, who initiated the introduction and relationship, eases out of the situation when she feels the newcomer is at ease, and feels comfortable.

Miss Campbell stated that new children will sometimes try swearing and hitting when they first arrive. The other kids will come to her, not, she said, as tattletales, but to confirm, "Hey, does this guy have to follow the same rules as I do? Because if he does, he's broken one." She stressed that the swearing and hitting nearly always subsides in a short time, as the child learns to be comfortable with his new surroundings.



Skateboarding is only one of many outdoor activities at the center.