

Ellenville School's Out Program

by **Stephanie Beaver**

Ellenville School's Out Director

A few years ago, in response to much needed before-and-after-school childcare in Ellenville, the YMCA of Kingston and Southeast Ulster County opened a satellite branch of the YMCA **School's Out Program**. The program begins at 6:30 AM and ends at 6:00 PM each school day (located in a separate building behind the *Ellenville Elementary School*). The program provides parents with a safe place to leave their children before and after school and gives the children much needed time for play, arts & crafts, and homework.

I am very proud of the program we offer, the dedicated staff who give so much of themselves and, most of all, the children who continue to blossom while in our care. We are currently serving over 32 families in the Ellenville area, and have doubled enrollment this year in both our morning and afternoon programs.

The children who come to our program represent a wide variety of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives, which is what makes our program so unique! Every child's presence is valued and each has contributed so much into making this program what it is today. It is, in effect, their program and we are simply following their lead. Likewise, we are fortunate to have the cooperation and help of so many parents who support us and offer valuable parental input and suggestions.

Veteran Site Director Hilda Gentry heads the morning program. "Miss G." has been with the program since its inception and brings this valuable experience and a maternal attitude with her. AM Counselor Denise Rinaldi-Depuy started this past year and instantly became a vital asset to the program. The two of them have developed many new and exciting activities this year including DEAR (Drop Everything And READ!), "circle time" (a special time for children to share their experiences and thoughts), Exercise Friday, and Community Service, which includes helping with room chores as well as maintaining the cleanliness of the playground. In addition, arts & crafts, group games, and "homework time" round out the morning program. The children are then walked over to school for breakfast before classes begin at 9:10 AM.

The afternoon program begins upon school dismissal when the children are walked from school to our childcare center. Another experienced veteran, Site Director June Pestone, who is also our in-house arts & crafts expert "extraordinaire," heads the afternoon program. Give Mrs.

Pestone just about anything to work with and she will come up with a work of art each and every time! Another newcomer, PM Counselor Annette Steele, adds an upbeat personality, much humor, and years of experience as a teacher's assistant to the program.

We are also lucky enough to have two *Ellenville High School* seniors assisting in the afternoon: Megan Neville, who has over 100 hours of volunteer time logged in at our program, and Corey Steele, who is sponsored by the WIA program of the YMCA. These two young people really connect with the children and, like all of the staff, give so freely of themselves.

New and exciting programs have been initiated this year for the afternoon. Although the primary emphasis in the afternoon is on recreation, "homework time," "jazzercise" music and dance, and educational games are main staples. In addition, there is a strong emphasis on creative arts & crafts with children participating in the "hands-on" creation of liquid chalk, play-dough, papier-mâché and many others. The children learn a bit about chemistry and science and have a great time in the process.

The *Ellenville School's Out Program* is truly a cooperative effort and we would like to take this opportunity to thank some of those involved. The *Ellenville Elementary School* administrators, Mr. Shaw and Mrs. Eikszta, have been never-ending in their support of the program; we thank them for all of their help and cooperation. We are also grateful for the guidance of Regional Branch Director Bill Doughman, who has made himself available to us 24/7, and for all of the advice and support from the Kingston YMCA staff, as well as the New Paltz School's Out branch.

In short, *The Ellenville School's Out Program* is a work in progress and always adapting to meet new needs. We are experiencing a period of growth, new ideas, and much excitement. The first half of the school year has been both challenging and rewarding for all of us and we are currently looking forward to the remainder of the school year as well as planning a six-week Summer Program.

We welcome all input and suggestions and are available if anyone would like a tour of the facility. We are always looking for donations and are currently in need of a television and VCR, as well as toys, games, comfortable children's furniture for our "reading corner," computer equipment, and a much-needed copy machine. For further information, suggestions or to make donations please contact, Stephanie Beaver, *Ellenville School's Out Director*, 647-0200 X252.





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