

Afflicted Children Make Up Sunshine Class

By Virgil Tipton

Staff Writer.

School children ordinarily live a life of bustling activity, but there are 16 pupils in a special class at Douglas grade school who take it easy from the beginning of the school day to the end. Some of them even take naps two or three hours each day.

A portion of the group is shown reclining on couches in a special restroom during the regular daily rest period which lasts from noon to 1:30 p.m. Daily rest is a "must" on the class program.

The 16 youngsters make up a group known as the "sunshine class." Each of them at one time in his or her life "caught" rheumatic heart fever or else became afflicted with some other heart condition.

Program 6 Years Old

But thanks to a program launched six years ago in the Springfield school system, these children are receiving treatment which either will cure them completely or teach them to live within their limitations.

"It is extremely important that rheumatic conditions be discovered in the early stage," Miss Dorothy Southwick, special school nurse, said yesterday in an interview at the school. "If rheumatic conditions can be arrested early enough they may not affect the heart."

"In this connection," she continued, "medical research is very important because as yet we don't know the full story behind rheumatic fever and other diseases affecting the heart."

Commenting on the current heart campaign which she avidly supports, Miss Southwick said its benefits may in the near future be of untold value in preventing and curing diseases affecting the heart, not only of youngsters, but of old alike.

First of Kind

In a way the special class at Douglas school is a "guinea pig." Miss Southwick, who is a certified public health nurse, also, says the group was the first of its kind in the United States. She was quite proud to disclose that school officials from throughout the United States and even from foreign countries had made special trips here to study the "sunshine class" program.

There's a reason why the program has caught the eye of school officials far and wide. It has classified rheumatically affected children as a group in need of attention just as much as the children who are victims of polio and are required to wear braces.

"A child with a rheumatic heart may not have the appeal or sympathy as does a child wearing braces, but he nevertheless is just as much in need of medical attention, and probably more," Miss Southwick declared.

Show Gains

An indication of what the "sunshine class" program is doing in the way of restoring health is well illustrated in a weight chart at the school. The chart shows the weight gains month by month of each "sunshine class" member. Several pupils enrolled weighing 60 pounds. Within six months many of them were over the 100 mark.

A special diet which is a part of the program accounts for these remarkable gains. The children are fed twice daily at the school.

Mrs. Kathryn Cain, the "sunshine class" teacher, said the diet also accounted for more studious pupils. "In many cases when the rheumatically affected child is referred to us, he or she just doesn't seem to be interested in class work, but within a few months a big difference can be noted," she said.

Rheumatic fever, like polio, is not a respecter of persons. It hits the rich and the poor alike, Miss Southwick commented.

Funds for the "sunshine class" come from the state treasury. "However, this shouldn't keep us from donating to the heart campaign, because it is a means of doing research to prevent and cure more quickly the diseases that affect not only these children, but many older persons," Miss Southwick added.

Donations for the heart campaign may be mailed to Heart, C/O Hotel Leland.