

# Rent-A-Kid Growth Past Expectations, Chief Says

By PLU TRIBBLE  
Editor

"Rent-A-Kid is going beautifully. Beyond all expectations," Southsider Mrs. Joy Ruyle, administrator of the program, said in a recent interview. Began last summer to help West End teens earn more money for essentials and for school-to-school necessities, the program has grown to encompass 11 locations with an enrollment of 800 teenagers, ages 14-16.

The idea for renting kids for jobs originated with Mrs. Joy Ruyle's creative mind. But, she doubted it could make it become a reality. With the encouragement and help of Father Edward Dilley, then with St. Anthony's Catholic Church in West End, Rent-A-Kid not only became a reality but a thriving one which helped 400 young people last summer.

Now, the program is a pilot project in metro Atlanta, and if it works here this summer, the program will be instituted in all major cities of the United States. From the success the program is meeting at its one-third mark, Rent-A-Kid should become a national program next year.

"We are cataloging job titles and descriptions of jobs which are available and acceptable," Joy said. These will be used to set up programs elsewhere. Acceptable jobs, Mrs. Ruyle explained, are those which conform to federal and state child labor laws.

Some of the jobs handled by the teenagers are baby sitting, ironing, cleaning, helping others, assisting in packing for movers and unpacking, window washing, yard work, painting, under supervision, loading, unloading, stack-

ing, stuffing envelopes, most any kind of temporary, part time work.

"The girls particularly like serving as party



Water Sprite

Cynthia Rhodes emerges like a water sprite from the wading pool at the College Park Recreation Center. Cynthia, who will be four in August, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Rhodes of College Park. (Photo by Bill Grimes)

assistants," Mrs. Ruyle said. "They help in serving and cleaning up at parties." Presently the girls also provide baby sitting services at Atlanta motels and hotels.

Some of the job requests are a little unusual, the administrator said. One caller asked for a baby sitter—for four St. Bernard dogs. A radio station is using Rent-A-Kid to answer phones during a contest. Last week a department store hired three Rent-A-Kids to demonstrate a new toy.

And a paper company, desperate for old papers to reprocess, is furnishing trucks at four Rent-A-Kid locations and has hired six kids at each center to work on the paper drive. The paper drive locations, are Kirkwood, Dixie Hills, Forest Park and Perry Homes.

Mrs. Ruyle said people can take their papers to these locations or call Rent-A-Kid at 577-5252 if they have too much paper to haul, and a truck will come by and pick up the papers which do not have to be bundled or tied. This pick up service will be in effect the first two weeks of July.

"The exciting thing about this program," Joy said, "is that it has opened a new labor market. It has stimulated jobs in an untapped area that will continue to provide employment for teenagers. The grass keeps growing. People keep having babies. Dust keeps collecting."

The most satisfying aspect of the program, according to its administrator who is an employment specialist for EOA, is what it has meant and continues to mean to the kids. "Adults sometimes don't realize what is important to a young person," she said.

## Rent-A-Kid

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Last year at the end of the program, Mrs. Ruyle received a letter from one of the West End Rent-A-Kids, thanking her for the job opportunities. He said that means a lot to these teenagers.

He had been able to buy shoes for all of his brothers and sisters and himself. He paid his locker fee at school. For the first time he had a gym suit. "Now I don't feel different," the young boy wrote. "I don't mind going to school this year."

"By helping teenagers at the age of 14 and 15, we can keep them from dropping out of school and joining the hard-core unemployed at the age of 16, before their motivation is killed," Mrs. Ruyle said.

She estimates there are 30,000 kids in the metro area who want and need employment. There are not enough jobs for them. Industry and business can't absorb this many kids.

"Rent-A-Kid is helping to fill the gap."

The program is funded this summer by the US Department of Labor and the Metro Atlanta Commission on Crime and Juvenile Delinquency. "This is the first time the US Department of

Labor has ever paid for any kind of program for kids younger than 16," Joy said.

Presently job orders and the kids enrolled in the program are about even. "We would like to have double the number of job orders we now have, Mrs. Ruyle said, "so before the summer is over we can enroll the 2000 teenagers we have slots for." As job orders increase, enrollment can be increased.

Joy is optimistic that 2000 will be enrolled in the program before summer ends. "If Atlanta keeps cooperating as it is now, we will get this many enrolled." She believes the only way Rent-A-Kid could fail anywhere is if a city is not open and warm in its reception of the program as Atlanta is.

The Optimists Club in the metro area has given the program a big boost. They have furnished T-shirts with "Rent-A-Kid" across the front. After a teenager works eight hours on a job in the program, he is eligible for one of the shirts and wears it on his job.

A Rent-A-Kid orders are going through a central office this year. The phone number to call is 577-5252.

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