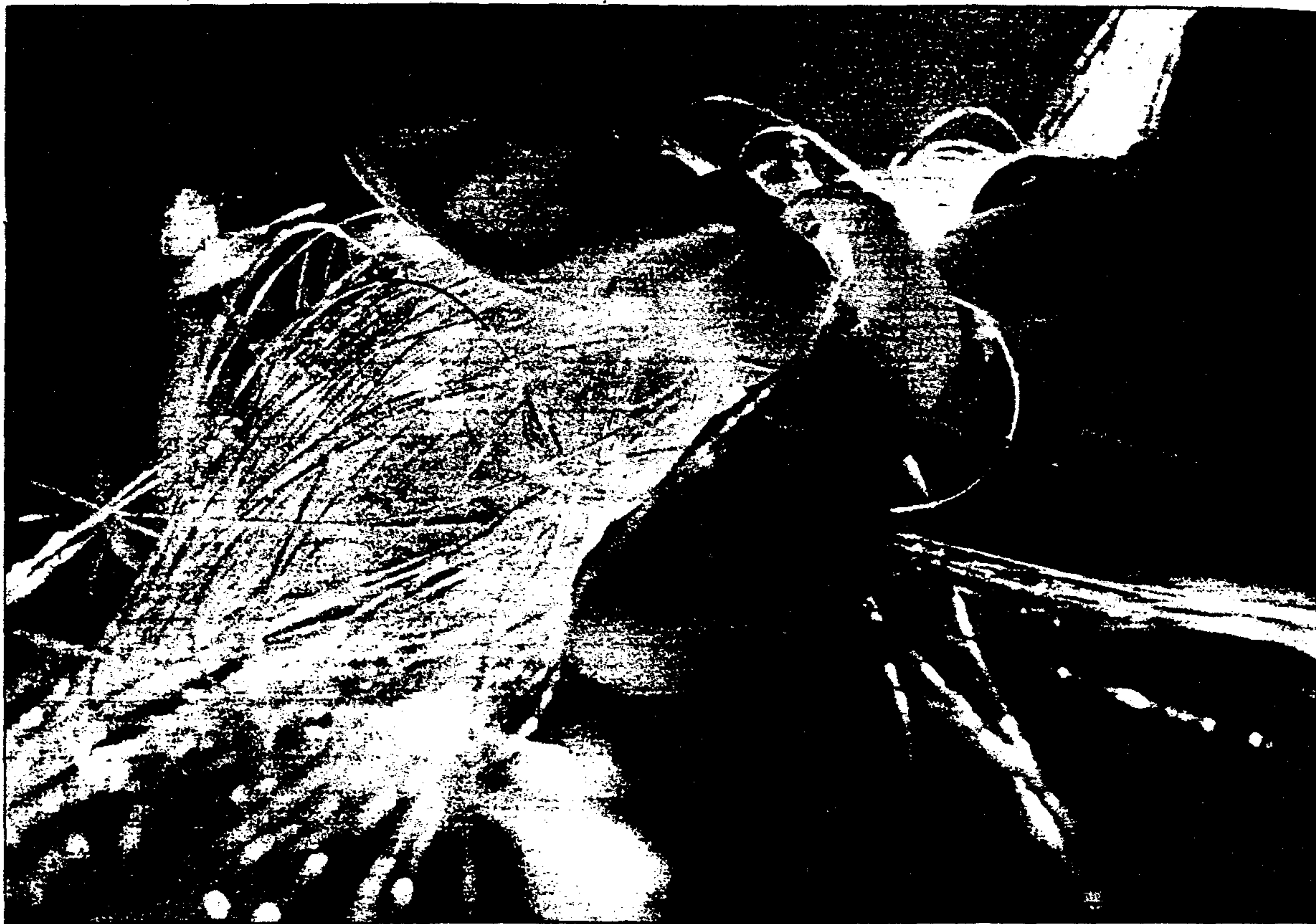


Now that's a night light!



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Elisha Cook, 11, holds fibre optic cord while lying on a waterbed at the new Snoezelen Room at Capilano elementary school. The room has been designed to stimulate the senses of children with severe disabilities, making it easier for them to relax and learn. Story / B1

# A classroom of calm and senses

Lights, sounds and aromas create a special place for disabled children

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The spaghetti-like mass of fibre-optic cables is eye-catching, the vibrating cushion a tempting diversion.

But Jon Neumann makes a bee-line for the bubble tube the minute he enters the new Snoezelen room at Capilano elementary school.

"It's a light," he says, following the bubbles with his hands as they waft up a tall, clear cylinder. "It's water. I like it. It's a bubble."

The Snoezelen (SNOOZ-a-lin) room is designed to stimulate and relax profoundly disabled children like Jon, 9. Lights, soothing music, appealing aromas and interesting textures help them explore their senses, says Stacy Frigon, head of the school's dependent handicapped program.

"We want to teach our kids something," she says. "In this room, we can let them become the leaders and we can follow."

The children have been using the \$21,000 room since December, but the school is holding an open house tonight at 6:30 p.m.

to show it to the public.

The Snoezelen room has a different effect on every child. Elisha Cook, 11, curls up under the fibre-optic light spray on a warm waterbed. Her muscles relax, making it easier for her aide to help her stretch in physiotherapy.

The room gives Casia Sam something to talk about.

"Cool," she says as an aide makes a fountain of the light spray in her hands. Casia, 8, has

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Stacy Frigon

Down's Syndrome and her vocabulary is limited, but it has grown here. One day, she saw the mirror ball's reflections on the wall and said, "Look! Stars!"

"We didn't even know she had that word in her repertoire," says Frigon.

Melissa Green, 12, is legally blind. But her ability to track light with her peripheral vision has noticeably improved. Another child cries and tries to hurt himself in the classroom. In the Snoezelen, he calms down, says Frigon.

"With some kids it builds excitement. With other kids, it relaxes them."

The Ronald McDonald foundation put up the money to turn the storage room at the back of



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Casia Samm, 8, with a bubble tube in the Snoezelen Room.

Frigon's class into a Snoezelen. Frigon knows some people don't think schools should turn to corporations for money, but she also knows the project would never have qualified for funding from the school board.

## SNOEZELN ROOM

- ◆ Snoezelen combines the Dutch words for sniffing and dozing.
- ◆ It was developed in the Netherlands to both stimulate and relax people with sensory and learning disabilities. The idea is not to instruct but to allow the person to explore the environment at his or her own pace.
- ◆ You can see the Snoezelen room for yourself tonight from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. in Room 15 at Capilano elementary school (10720 54th St). Coffee and cake will be served.

"It's greatly appreciated by us for the quality of life it's giving our children," she says.

There are other Snoezelen rooms in the Edmonton area, but this is the first in the Edmonton public school district.

The 16 children in the dependent handicapped program won't be the only ones to benefit. Other Capilano students have nestled in the white cushions and soft light for story time, and the Alberta Association for the Dependent Handicapped will use the room this summer.

The Snoezelen room is a hard place to leave. Just ask Jon.

"Are you just about ready to go, Jon?" one of the aides asks, as the smell of vanilla fills the room.

"No," he replies without hesitation, his gaze returning to the bubble tube.