

# Tim-Ro's success comes from sensing the needs of the neglected, abused

By SHEILA MCCARTHY DUNNELLS

To some people, celebrating the Year of the Child must seem superfluous. Their argument is that in no other country is so much emphasis placed on the young.

However, the existence of a school like Tim-Ro proves that in spite of the common belief that most of today's children are spoiled, many children are neglected. Tim-Ro services the needs of children who have been physically and emotionally abused by their parents.

Tim-Ro, an acronym created from the names of the first students to attend, began in 1968. It is the result of an effort made by Elsie Archer, an educator who sensed the special needs of the emotionally impaired child.

For the past 12 years she has been the head of the school, which is located at 651 N. Woodward, Bloomfield Hills, in the Unitarian Church.

Explaining the need for a special school for these children, Ms. Archer said, "Children are placed here because they were so abused physically and emotionally that their development has been interfered with."

"It is not," she was quick to point out, "a sad place. It is, on the contrary, quite joyful. There are successes."

She spoke fondly of some of the school's success stories. "One child who attended is named Rodney. When he

first came to Tim-Ro he was like the 'wild child.' His head was always down, he wouldn't talk to anyone, he was totally withdrawn. He certainly didn't trust anyone."

"It took two years," she continued, "but today, he is our miracle child. He now socializes with others. This is what we strive for."

Ms. Archer's pride in Rodney's progress was obvious. "When we took him to the park this summer, he actually walked up and talked to a child he didn't know."

Kevin is another youngster who has had two problems to cope with. Not only did he have an abusive mother, but he was born with a urinary problem.

"The little boy," she continued, "was hospitalized 30 times in his preschool years. The double trauma turned him into a very withdrawn child."

Fortunately, she said, he has begun to make friends and form attachments with the staff.

An inability to speak or communicate is one of the by-products of an abusive home situation, she said. But, it can be overcome eventually.

"This year the children have made significant strides. We have a volunteer mother who brings her 5-year-old son with her to the school. The other day, he started a game. The children imitated everything he did and said. Eventually they were all so involved in the play and talking that the staff just

stood back and enjoyed the progress.

"We base a child's growth on relationships," said Ms. Archer. "When an impaired child can develop a friendship and learn to play with other children, it indicates some of the effects of the trauma are beginning to recede."

"We count play as a large part of the therapy because some emotionally impaired children cannot play. When dealing with children with an emotional problem, play is not a fringe benefit of coming to school. It is necessary for growth."

A very special part of Tim-Ro's success, said Ms. Archer, is the staff. The staff can continue to succeed because of the high ratio of teachers to students.

"Working with emotionally impaired children can be difficult," she said. "Trying children can be exhausting. Because we work as a family, as a community, we give each other vitality. No teacher is ever isolated."

"Each child is planned for individually," said a Tim-Ro staff member. "For some children play is important. For others, physical needs must come first."

Jackie Mann, the school nurse, has taken some children home for lunch or a bath. "What we really need," she said with a chuckle, "is a bathtub right here at the school. Water play can be most therapeutic. We could also use an indoor swimming facility for the winter."

Tim-Ro handles children from the age of three to 12-years of age. The school day is from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 12 months of the year.

If there were no Tim-Ro facility what would happen to these children? According to Ms. Archer, many of the abused children would go untreated. The process of testing and placing can take years.

"We, at Tim-Ro, will see the children directly," she said.

Like most facilities, Tim-Ro needs money. But just as important is the need for male teachers, who are young to retirement age, to round out the school's staff of teachers, nurses, music and art specialists.

The school is also looking for a psychiatric consultant. The school needs, she said, someone willing to give three hours a week, of which two hours will be spent with the students, and a final hour devoted to feedback with the teachers.

The school in some ways is similar to any facility for the young. Bikes wear out, Big Wheels no longer roll, and dolls lose their arms. At the moment, the big need is for capes. "The children are mesmerized by super-heros. Each child wants his own cape," said Ms. Archer.

Corporate, business and private generosity have all aided Tim-Ro financially.

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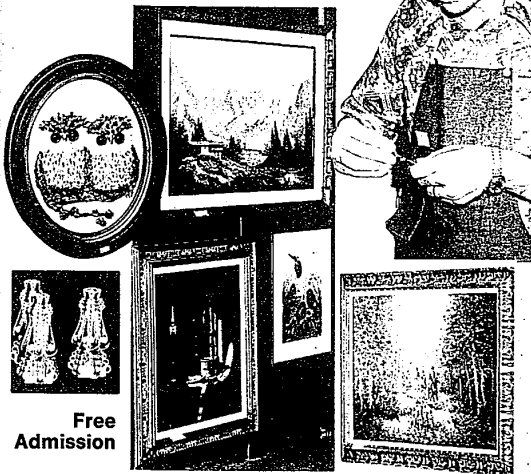
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