

Unusual fears hamper goals, therapist says

By MARY GNIEWEK

Thirty per cent of the U.S. population has phobic conditions that interfere with the effective pursuit of personal or career goals, says Joseph Damiani, executive director of the Farmington Hills-based Suburban Mental Health Clinic.

Despite the high number, few people seek professional help to overcome fear of crowds, open spaces, flying, social contact, animals or insects.

"People with phobias only comprise about 5 per cent of our caseload," Damiani said. "That is because they usually choose to avoid the anxiety provoking situation. What they don't realize is that their fears can be overcome with treatment."

Damiani, a social worker, organized his clinic in the Quakertown Medical Arts Center about a year ago. It is staffed by nine psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists who are all involved in individual and group therapy.

"We treat the phobic individual with traditional psychotherapy — that includes relaxation and assertiveness training and systematic desensitization."

Treatment involves gradually exposing the person to the object or event they fear. Though the cause of phobias are not readily identified, Damiani believes they may be rooted in some frightening childhood event that gets displaced in the phobic's mind.

"A PERSON CONVINCES himself that a certain object is scary. And then they justify the fear. Agoraphobia, or fear of leaving home, is very common. Agoraphobics are afraid to leave home, especially by themselves. They may justify that fear by saying there is too much street violence," Damiani said.

Treatment first involves defining the fear. Then it can take either of two steps: imagining the situation until the fear becomes dissociated with it (desensitization) or exposing the person to the situation, like riding in an elevator, firsthand.

"Usually, direct exposure is more productive. But sometimes, it's impractical."

In direct exposure, the therapist may take a person with a fear of heights for a climb up a fire escape.

But if a person is afraid of flying or speaking in front of a large group of people, systematic desensitization is applied.

"After defining the fear, the person creates a hierarchy of ten or fifteen anxiety provoking thoughts related to the phobia. For fear of flying, the least anxiety related thought may be purchasing a ticket. Packing, driving to the airport and ultimately, being in the air at 30,000 feet would follow."

Once the items are defined, the client learns relaxation techniques to be practiced at home and at the clinic. When the person learns total relaxation, they begin to think of each step in the hierarchy until they can progress to the fear itself without becoming anxious.

Heavy traffic is headache for Middlebelt students

By MARY GNIEWEK

Farmington school administrators hope a study by the Oakland County Road Commission will provide a solution to a mounting traffic congestion problem on Middlebelt between 10 and 11 Mile Rds.

The one mile stretch houses two schools, Middlebelt Elementary and East Junior High, with a combined student population in excess of 1200.

"The biggest problem is volume of traffic," said William Frisk, assistant superintendent of finance and services. "The traffic does not permit safe street crossing, especially at rush hour. There have been several minor accidents. No one has been hurt yet but we don't want to wait for that to happen. This is a critical problem."

Though highway signs caution drivers that they are driving through a school crossing area, the posted speed limit is 45 mph.

"The superintendent (of schools) could request the speed be reduced during school hours if there were no side-walks on either side of the street. But there is a sidewalk on the east side (of Middlebelt) so there is nothing we can do," said Scott Bacon, an administrative assistant for the schools.

"The road commission is studying the situation to determine what is needed — possibly a traffic light. Sidewalks

would then be required along Middlebelt. We'd have to go to the city to determine how it would be financed."

Though Middlebelt is a county road, the city is willing to share costs.

"We do participate in joint improvement projects with the county," said Ralph Magid, director of public services for Farmington Hills.

"At several intersections, we have shared the cost of a traffic signal half and half. A standard operating signal costs between \$5,000 and \$8,000."

"Middlebelt is carrying more and more volume, which leads to greater congestion. We realize the problem exists."

Magid said a passing lane at the entrance points to both schools has already been planned and should be put into operation this year. He said it will keep traffic from backing up on the busy thoroughfare.

"I even have trouble driving out of the lot after school," said Walter Prince, principal of Middlebelt. "There is so much traffic in the afternoon that the buses have a hard time getting out."

About 60 percent of Middlebelt's 350 students are bused. Prince attributes part of the reason for no accidents involving school children to a change in the boundaries ten years ago. Students no longer have to cross Middlebelt.

East Junior High principal Alton

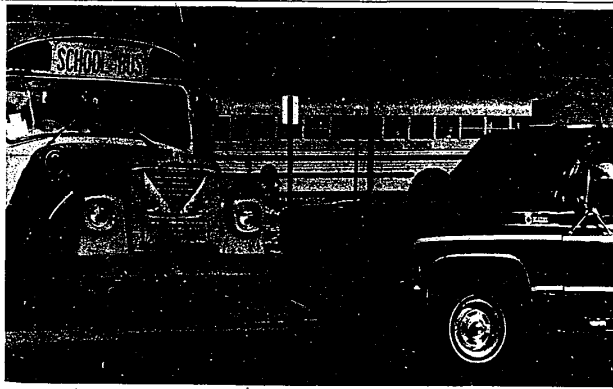
Bennett is involved in traffic studies with the county.

"My concern is for the safety of the children, but several factors have to be considered. For instance, would a traffic signal disrupt the traffic flow? That could create another problem by backing traffic up into the intersection."

Some of East's 950 students have to cross Middlebelt to get to school, but 70 percent of the youngsters are bused. There have been no accidents involving East students on Middlebelt, but a ninth grader was hit by a car on Ten Mile near Middlebelt last month.

"He was crossing in a bad spot — not with the traffic signal," Bennett said.

Farmington Hills police Sgt. Richard Krueger said traffic was directed by patrol officers in front of East last fall, so that buses could leave the school in the midst of heavy afternoon traffic.



Traffic on Middlebelt Road worries parents and school officials who want to see the traffic slowed for student safety. (Staff photo)

Female judge to speak about law enforcement

United States District Court Judge Patricia Boyle will speak on "Our Criminal Justice System" at the annual American Affairs meeting of Pioneer Women at 8 tonight in the Labor Zionist Institute, 2855 Middlebelt Road in Farmington Hills.

Judge Boyle has served as Recorder of Court Judge for Detroit, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney for Wayne County and as Assistant United States Attorney.

She has been designated "Feminist of the Year" by the National Organization for Women; received the "Spirit of Detroit" Award; and is a member of the Women Rape Crisis Task Force.

Marsha Katz, attorney with the Crime Strike Force for the United States, will be chairwoman for the evening.

Attendance is open to members and their spouses. Guests may attend. There is no charge for admission and refreshments will be served.

For more information call Pioneer Women at 851-9759.

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