

How Retarded Kids Function In World Without Sight

Regional Affairs

By KATHY MORAN

Close your eyes and live in the world of the blind for awhile.

For those who have grown up in our "sighted" society, it is hard to imagine life without lights or colors, or a world where everything is blurred or distorted.

The closest we can come is closing our eyes and pretending for awhile—but we

can open them when the going gets rough.

THE 130 VISUALLY handicapped and blind children at Plymouth State Home and Training School don't have the option of opening their eyes to escape the darkness or the distortions.

But they have something we lack—an acute sense of hearing.

A person with vision never



TEACHER LINDA Yellich holds the mirror for this little girl who can see enough to find her reflection in the mirror.

develops his sense of hearing the way these children do.

Walking in a hallway, they can detect an open doorway simply by the pressure difference.

For the PSH retarded children, visual deficiencies are just another of the problems they have to learn to live with.

"It's one more piece that goes with the package of the child and is not necessarily the

major characteristic," said Dr. Nancy Steele, the new director of the program for the blind retarded.

DR. STEELE came to Plymouth State Home only two months ago, but already her influence is being felt in Sullivan Hall, the home for the visually handicapped retarded children.

She comes to PSH after spending a year in India, where she was a consultant to the American Foundation for Overseas Blind. India houses 50 per cent of the world's blind due to disease, vitamin A deficiency, and unsanitary conditions.

Dr. Steele's job there was to set up a model program for training the blind, who have been neglected in the face of India's multitudinous problems.

At Plymouth State Home, she dreams of setting up a program where the children can learn to cope with their visual handicaps and return to live in the sighted society as soon as possible.

"We would like to work ourselves right out of business," Dr. Steele said. "The more children we have, the more I want to get them out into society."

THOUGH DR. Steele is combating a severe shortage of staff, they still manage to give the children as much individual care as possible.

A vocational program teaches them good work habits and the basics in vocational training. The children work assembling cars for a toy manufacturer and have the gratification of making something themselves and earning a minimal amount of money.

Around Thanksgiving some of the children put together a turkey dinner with the help of the staff and served it to their classmates as well as to the staff.

Considering their visual handicaps, the children walk, crawl or scoot around with a great deal of agility. Toys like a baseball that gives off a

beeping sound, help them participate in activities, despite their multiple problems.

"The people here really work well together," Dr. Steele said, explaining that they apply a team approach to a child's problems.

IN ONE CASE, Dr. Steele had noticed that a child did not respond well to sounds.

So the teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist and other staff members were alerted to keep a special eye on the child to determine if he responded to sounds.

With classrooms of 30 or more children, the main difficulty becomes giving individual attention to one child without neglecting the others.

"Our children suffer from a lack of environmental stimulation," Dr. Steele said. "We simply do not have the staff to give them the love and attention and activity they need."

"We are aiming to teach the children so they can exert some control over their environment. We try to tap their potentials."

"Through testing we can determine what vision the child has and what level of behavior he functions at."

"He may have the tiniest use of his vision. Once we determine where he is now, we can determine where we can take him."

THE STATE Institution in Plymouth is one of the centers in Michigan for retarded children with visual deficiencies. Under Dr. Steele's direction, it is moving toward a comprehensive program for the visually handicapped.

Dr. Steele sees disadvantages to keeping the visually handicapped together in one area, but for now the "advantages outweigh the disadvantages."

They eventually have to learn to live in our sighted society, but by grouping the children together, the state home can give them the specialized attention they need.

And under the direction of Dr. Steele, the children can look for a great deal of specialized attention.



THE SIZE and shape of the blocks help this youngster to fit them back into the holder while Dr. Nancy Steele watches. She directs the program for the visually handicapped, retarded children at Plymouth State Home and Training School. (Observer photos by Kathy Moran)



THE BRIGHT COLORS and designs are perceptible to this youngster, who is fascinated with stacking them on top of one another.

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Young Hits Democratic Legislative Remap Plan

By KATHY MORAN

Not one person testified at the Wayne County public hearing on legislative apportionment despite the fact that northwest Wayne County voters will lose representation under one of the plans proposed so far.

State Rep. Richard Young (D-Deaeron Heights) arrived just minutes after the hearing was adjourned but told Observer Newspapers that he and representatives have drawn an alternate plan which they will give to the Commission on Legislative Apportionment.

The commission is composed of four Democrats and four Republicans appointed by their parties. The commission members traveled around the state last week holding hearings of the plans for redistricting the state according to the "one-man, one-vote" principle. Attendance was low at the hearings.

YOUNG complained that even though the northwestern

section of Wayne County showed a surge in population over the past decade, the Democratic plan will take representation from the area.

He pointed out that the plan would take Plymouth City and Township out of its current 35th District and put it in a district with Washtenaw County areas. The same happens when Van Buren Township is coupled with Washtenaw County areas, northeastern Dearborn with Detroit, and southern Wayne County with Monroe County areas.

The Democratic plan also hurts incumbent Democratic representatives by putting some of them in districts where they will have to oppose other incumbents and putting some incumbents into Republican areas.

Young would be hurt by the plan because his home in northwest Dearborn Heights would land in Rep. John Bennett's (D-Redford Township) district.

copies of the alternative plan to the commission when it is completed. The commission will hold a public hearing in the state capitol on Jan. 14.

WHEN the hearing opened Friday morning nine persons were present. After a slide presentation on the proposed Senate and House plans, the meeting was recessed for lunch.

Five persons were sitting in the audience when it reopened at 1:30 p.m., but when no one commented on the plans, it was adjourned shortly afterwards.

"It's really too bad when persons don't show up for something as important as this," one person in the audience commented.

Other commission members include Co-chairmen—Paul Goebel of Grand Rapids and A. Robert Kleiner of Grand Rapids; Mrs. Lillian Hatcher of Detroit; Anthony Licata of Plymouth; Ralph Huhala of Kingsford; Virginia Selin of Marquette; and Kenneth Thompson of Traverse City.

Enrollment Time Set At S'craft

The fall semester, which attracted more than 6,000 students to Schoderkraft College, is winding down with final examinations set for Dec. 13-16, and advance registrations for the winter term being accepted through Dec. 17.

Regular registration for the winter semester will be held on Jan. 3-4, with classes beginning the fifth.

Advance registration is being accepted from 8:30 to 4:30 daily in Room L-100 of the Bradner Library. Evening students may pre-register by mail.

PERSONS WHO are planning to attend the college for the first time will want to visit the Admissions Office on campus.

Hours for regular registration are 8:30-4:30 Jan. 3 and 8:30-11:30 Jan. 4. Evening students may register from 6:30 to 9 both evenings. Registration is held in the auxiliary gymnasium of the Physical Education Building.

An advising period for persons enrolling in the apprenticeship program will be held Dec. 27-28. Appointments for either day or evening may be arranged with Kenneth Schultz, director of the program.

Schultz has recently been informed that a number of apprenticeship openings may be available through a major plant in Detroit.

Enrollment last winter was 5,353, about 60 students more than the number attending during the fall of 1970. Usually the first semester has outdrawn the second. If that pattern holds this year, somewhat fewer than the record 6,017 currently on campus are expected for the winter term.

The Christmas vacation period at Schoderkraft is Dec. 20-31, and all college offices will be closed Dec. 23-24 and 30-31.

THE PLAN that will be proposed by local legislators carves Livonia up among four representatives, Young said.

Young's district, which currently encompasses Dearborn Heights, northeastern Westland and southern Livonia, would keep a portion of Livonia.

State Rep. James Tierney (D-Garden City) would get a portion of Livonia along with Reps. Marvin Stempien (D-Livonia) and John Bennett (D-Redford Township).

A plan drawn up by the Republicans locks northeastern Wayne County legislators into their own county.

Young said he would mail

Partridge Is Holiday Exhibit

A live partridge in a pear tree is on exhibit in Wonderland Center depicting the scene appearing on the 1971 commemorative Christmas stamp.

The exhibit is a representation of the line from the traditional Christmas carol, "The Twelve Days of Christmas." It is located at the west end of the mall and is open to the public during the regular Center hours. Wonderland is at Plymouth Rd. and Middle Belt.