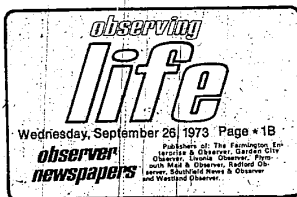


Society's Neglected

Find Life With Dignity



COMMUNITY LIVING CENTERS staff members check over records for the 51 residents of four homes for retarded adults. From left are Virginia Ditty, secretary, and Jeanne Sadler and Vicki Nelson, social workers. (Evert photos)



(This is the first of two articles on Community Living Centers, Inc., which operates residences for retarded adults. The second will be published in Observing Life Wednesday, Oct. 3.)

By MARGARET MILLER

For most people, it's no big deal to hold a job and be self-supporting.

Or to be accepted readily at home.

Or just to live in dignity.

But for the retarded adult, finding any of these values in life has been nearly impossible — until recently.

The difference is Community Living Centers, a concept in group living that has blossomed in Farmington to give hope to the retarded and their families all over the country.

Four homes operated now by Community Living Centers, Inc., mean a new life for 51 retarded persons.

Two more are under construction and will accommodate 32 more.

These are being built in Farmington and are the first to be funded by federal money through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Mrs. Mary Wagner, executive director of Community Living Centers, has a waiting list that at last count numbered more than 200.

The 51 now in the program live in large, comfortable homes, each presided over by house-parents. Most have jobs and earn regular wages. Some spend their days in sheltered workshops, and a few go to school.

All do their share in home chores, including taking care of their rooms.

Six young men even have advanced to the point where they have their own apartments, but they still are under the guidance of Community Living Centers.

Some of the current clients earn enough as dishwashers, hospital aides or maybe janitors to pay the \$240 a month room and board charge.

For others, there are full or supplemental stipends from the Michigan Department of Social Services. A few have families able to pay room and board for them.

All go regularly to the bank to take care of their own financial affairs — with the help of their house-parents and social workers in the Community Living operation.

And all find a pride in their homes and a comfortableness in their living situations that they never have known.

"There's a dignity these people never had before — in institutions and even in their own homes," said Mrs. Wagner.

Robert Wagner is the official houseparent and he and his wife live there with their youngest son.

"The rules of Community Living Centers require that one of the houseparents not be otherwise employed," Mrs. Wagner said. "For us, I'm the working parent — my

husband quit his tool and die job and is kept very busy supervising the meals and home management and driving the residents to and from work."

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"Before, they seldom went out and either just sat in institutions or were a problem to their families. Here they find closer relationships, have activities to enjoy."

One "boy" Mrs. Wagner loves to tell about, because he so well epitomizes the possibilities in this new way of looking at the retarded.

He was in an institution 17 years, she said, and barely learned to care for himself, let alone do any productive work. And the cost of his care there was anywhere from \$20 to \$40 a day.

"But we encourage them to be independent," she said. "Now not only paying his own way — he's saved money and buys savings bonds. He even likes to brag that now he's helping Uncle Sam, who took care of him for so long."

Community Living Centers have had several years of involvement, and most of it centers around Mary Wagner.

It was about five years ago that she began to realize, both as a special education teacher at North Farmington High School and as the mother of a retarded son, that there had to be something better for the retardate in today's society.

"Our special education students would seem to be doing well on the school programs," she said, "but after they graduated and were at home for a while they weren't doing so well."

"We had trained them for jobs, but without supervision they didn't function well in a work situation. And their families found them increasingly hard to handle."

She and her husband, Robert, a tool-and-die maker, took a couple of retarded boys into their home. With the supervision they knew how to give, the retardates did much better.

There were so many requests for more of this sort of care that in 1968 the Wagners and several other families formed a non-profit corporation to try to set up a community living situation.

Wagner House opened in October of 1969 with six young men at first. Ideally located in a rambling old farm house on 13 Mile in Farmington Hills that had been used as a nursing home and thus was zoned multi-dwelling, it is still going strong.

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MRS. MARY WAGNER, Community Living executive director, at her desk in the organization's downtown Farmington offices.



SNOOPY, the pet of Wagner House, Community Living Centers, Inc., home for retarded adults, gets a bit of grooming. Maureen is doing the honors while Kathy watches.

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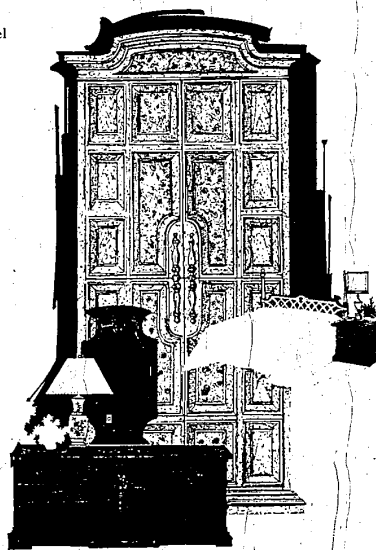
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Decorators Meet Oct. 4

Betty Poellet will begin a two-session workshop on painting bachelor buttons on china when the Northville Spring China Painters meet at 10 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 4.

In the Plymouth Credit Union. She will explain the first five steps in painting the delicate flowers, and next month will complete the instruction. All interested may attend.

m. m. memos

One of fall's most enjoyable events — the big football game — took on a new dimension for us last weekend.

We had someone to watch down on that field. Not a husky griddier, from our all-girl household, but a clarinet player in the big band that until very recently was known as "famous marching men."

We had wondered if we'd be able to find our sophomore who is helping "integrate" the marching band in its second year of co-ed participation.

For three years a fellow student we knew had carried a blue drum, so we always located him without difficulty. The younger girls suggested that their big sister might try a pink or green clarinet.

Turned out such an impossible move wasn't necessary. She's not very tall, and sandwiched between two

six-footers, she was pretty easy to keep track of, even through the shifting patterns the band maneuvered.

Later we tried something else new — staying all the way through a one-sided game and then following the band back to the practice field.

Our youngest thought staying abreast of her sister's rank on that march and trying out some of the band's fan-fried chicken before the game.

She even got to try on the plumed bandsman hat. I admit to a bit of huffing and puffing before finishing that quick walk back.

Maybe, by the time our daughter finishes a season in the marching band, her mother will be in a little better condition.

—Margaret Miller