

A School For Kids Who Never Had One



IT'S A NEW KIND of school now in operation in Cloverdale School in Farmington for the severely mentally handicapped. At left, supervisor Fred Parker helps a child put an ornament on the Christmas tree. Above, Mary O'Leary of Southfield, one of the youngest pupils, sports a victory smile because she just managed to get from a crawling to a sitting position. (Fran Evert photos)

By CORINNE ABATT

Some sweeping changes have taken place since the state passed a mandatory special education act last summer.

One, closest to home, is the opening of the Developmental Training Center located in the Cloverdale School in Farmington. It is one of five centers in Oakland County. Each is using a slightly different approach to the challenge of the act.

Under the new law, educational programs for the severely mentally handicapped must be provided to age 25. Prior to the passage, programs for these people, not considered either trainable or educable, were offered on a hit-or-miss basis under the county mental health program.

Parents had to scramble to find something to meet their needs, if indeed they could even get in contact with the proper people.

Now with financial aid from the state and county, programs are being provided regardless of mental and physical capabilities.

Fred W Parker, supervisor of the special education program at Cloverdale, said he called Lansing to clarify the bill's implications and quotes a remark from the other end of the conversation: "If a severely handicapped child is born at 9 a.m., the program for it should be ready by 3 p.m. the same day."

Parker says that, of course, diagnosis takes much longer, but that comment does give an idea of the

scope of the required planning. The program for those 4 through 25 was started at Cloverdale last summer. There are 50 enrolled. They come every school day from 9 a.m. to 2:15 p.m., 250 days a year. The year around schedule is also new.

More recently, the pre-school program was opened. The age range is 11 months through four years. Like the other students, pre-schoolers come from Clarenceville, Southfield, South Lyon, Novi and Walled Lake as well as Farmington.

The staff for the 60 students includes three teachers, 10 teacher aids, a full time nurse, a full time occupational therapist and hopefully and soon part-time physical therapist. That comes out to a ratio of six students to one staff.

Even with a ratio like that, Parker said, there is a realization that volunteer help could greatly augment the program.

"We have some volunteers," he said, "and find that we are keeping them busy - we just need some extra hands in situations like mealtime."

He suggested this might be an area in which senior citizens might find a place, "sort of like foster grandparents."

The challenges which Parker and his staff meet daily are far different from those usually associated with education. Many youngsters, for instance, have severe physical problems. Toilet training goes beyond the

pre-school class. There are cribs in both the pre-school and kindergarten rooms. There are walkers and padded chairs. A number of the children, who fall easily wear protector helmets.

The school maintains a complete laundry facility. Sheets, pillow cases, bibs and everything but the clothes the youngsters wear to school are laundered on the site.

Because many youngsters are prone to respiratory ailments and other infections, Parker says, "We run a sterile operation. Our cleaning routine is very much like a hospital. Two of our special education graduates, now program aids, are in charge of it."

The nurse, on duty throughout the school day, dispenses medications which many must have. At least three times since the program opened, a city rescue squad has been called when students had to be taken to the hospital.

Parker says, "Each time, the rescue squad was here in two minutes or less. They are really great."

He continues, "This is so different from what we think of an educational program. Our philosophy is that the place should sparkle, be stimulating, and be a cheerful, happy place to come. We are trying very hard to create a happy environment."

The pre-school class, different from what other centers offer, is an outgrowth of the home training program where a teacher visited each

observing
Wednesday, December 12, 1973 Page 4C
life
observer
newspapers

home. When she was driving many miles a day to get around to the 10 or 11 scattered from Walled Lake and Novi to Southfield and Farmington, a decision to change was made.

"We decided," says Parker, "that it would be educationally sound to have them in the building together where we had the equipment and the teacher centered."

At first there was some criticism from other centers about the move, but it is already a proven success. Most mothers accompany their children, bring them in and stay with them. The teacher picks up one child whose family doesn't provide transportation.

The program has had a remarkable effect on parents, and in turn the parents have had a remarkable effect on the program.

The pre-schoolers come two mornings a week, 9 a.m. to noon. One morning mothers are in the classroom with

the teachers and aids, and the other morning they are given a special in-service program by the nurse, the school psychologist or by some of the special education staff.

This gathering together of the parents has proved to be a great morale booster. Previously every one had the heartbreaking "I am alone" feeling, and here they found they were not alone.

"The camaraderie and so-

cial rapport between the parents is excellent...the parents are terribly cooperative. We have a lot of input from them, and we respond to their suggestions."

The pre-school room is a gaily decorated, much more so than an average pre-school room.

Looking at the mobiles hanging from the ceiling, the vast array of wall decorations and the colorful toys,

by the homebound teacher.

In the rest of the school youngsters are grouped according to chronological age. One group of six is being prepared to enter the trainable program in the schools. They are learning appropriate behavior in a school setting.

In the other rooms, the mental ages, Parker says, "go all over the range." The center is now involved in a testing program to evaluate and find the mental ages, but this is an arduous process. Some are not secure enough yet to speak, and others are different to evaluate because of physical involvements.

"The main thing is," Parker explains, "our staff are pleased with any growth they see. They are satisfied with minimal progress...Some people say we're just baby-sitting. I don't agree, but in fact we are doing just that, it's still helpful. It gives moms and dads more than five hours a day in which their child is getting good, professional care."

Esther Friedrichs Is Given AAUW's 1st Salute Award

Mrs. Esther Friedrichs, Livonia resident with a long list of community service contributions, is winner of the first "salute to women" award from the Livonia branch of the American Association of University Women.

The Livonia AAUW decided this year to make an award each year to the woman in the community who makes the greatest contribution in the four areas of AAUW concern - education, community issues, cultural interests and international relations.

Mrs. Friedrichs was selected after a committee submitted a list of candidates and the organization's executive board reviewed the names.

"She has a long list of accomplishments, at least one of which falls into each of the above categories," said Sister Margaret Basso, vice-president and program chairperson for the Livonia AAUW. Listing these, she said Esther Friedrichs is:

- A volunteer probation officer for the Livonia District Court.
- A member of the Livonia City Planning Commission.
- An active member of the Livonia League of Women Voters, in which she has served on committees studying local land use, transportation, international relations and youth services in Livonia.
- An active member of the Livonia Rotary Arms and the Livonia Town Hall.
- Active in the Bentley High School chapter of American Field Service and the American "mother" to an exchange student during one school year.

In addition, the citation stated, Mrs. Friedrichs spends several hours each week with a blind friend, reading to her and taking her and her child to classes at the Livonia Family Y, and she has made herself available to drive cancer patients to the doctor and for therapy treatments.

For three years Mrs. Friedrichs has been tutoring a fourth grade class in Inkster once a week. She and a fellow member of the Livonia LWV, Mrs. Mary Lou Lively, worked for several years in an inner-city nursery they established in an Office of Economic Opportunity center.

They also established a clothing depot there and operated it until the center closed.

The award was presented by Sister Margaret and Mrs. Barbara Mansfield, president of the Livonia branch AAUW.



MRS. ESTHER FRIEDRICHS (center) is winner of the first "salute to women" award presented by the Livonia AAUW. With her are Sister Margaret Basso (left), vice president and program chairman, and Mrs. Penny de Stigter. (Photo by Doug Johnson)

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