

Autistic children need help to fit in

By JACKIE KLEIN

The autistic child is a square peg in a round hole.

The withdrawn, self-absorbed youngster who is out of touch with reality doesn't quite fit into any program for the emotionally disturbed or the mentally retarded.

He seldom filters into the community and more often than not ends up in the back ward of an institution.

Four Michigan chapters of the National Society for Autistic Children aren't willing to accept the term "doomed" or "prognosis hopeless."

Their main thrust is toward public education programs, under the mandatory education act geared specifically for the autistic child.

Rosemary Angellotti, president of the Wayne County chapter of the National Society for Autistic Children, has been working closely with the 40-member Oakland County chapter and its president Ervin Countryman of Ferndale.

THE OAKLAND County chapter, formed about three years ago, is a parent and professional group as are chapters in Wayne County, southwest Michigan and Flint. They've been working to make available recent documented material on the best methods of dealing with the autistic child.

The Wayne County Intermediate School District bought a documented program from Washington University in St. Louis. The packaged curriculum will be applied at a development learning center for autistic and autistic-like children, expected to open in May. Mrs. Angellotti is hopeful that similar centers will be established in Oakland and other counties.

"In the most successful documented programs, eye contact is established between the child, parent and teacher," she explained.

"Goals are set and meetings are video taped and logged daily. At the center, a behavior management program is planned based on the theory of social exchange.

"THE AUTISTIC child has been on the bottom rung of the ladder and was the last to be included in the mandatory education act as emotionally impaired. One or two manage to sneak into the program if they fit and aren't severely autistic."

Autistic children who are programmed with the emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded usually regress and retreat further into themselves, she said. Most teachers lack expertise in the area of autism, she added.

"The origin of autism is unknown. Research points to a permanent bio-chemical disturbance as opposed to temporary problems in youngsters who are labeled 'emotionally disturbed.'"

Oakland County lacks a specific program for redirecting the autistic child, said Mrs. Angellotti. The county chapter has had little success in this area.

Hawthorn Center for Emotionally Disturbed Children, Oakland Training Institute and Roosevelt

School in Oak Park accept some autistic children, she said.

Oakland County Mental Health provides a facility for pre-school autistic children, she said.

"THE PROBLEM is funds for mental health are allocated for one year. The program is then evaluated, and if it hasn't proved successful, funds are withheld. There's a slow turnover with autistic children and fewer are accepted when long-term planning is involved.

"The severely autistic kid functions at a level of zero. It's difficult to get a commitment for public education for this type of youngster, so he gets dumped."

Mrs. Angellotti maintained because of the relatively low incidence of autism, stronger emphasis must be placed on the needs of the child or he won't fit in to any program.

"Unless more is done, the prognosis will be hopeless," she said. "About 50 percent of persons who have been institutionalized for many years have been diagnosed autistic."

"Perhaps if these individuals had been taken out of the emotionally disturbed category, their potential would have been realized."

OBITUARIES

RONALD COOLEY, 41, of Westland died April 17, 1974, in University Hospital in Ann Arbor. He was born March 8, 1933, in Monroe.

Surviving are wife Kandice and children Tommy, Andy, Tiffany and Brian.

Mr. Cooley lived in Farmington for many years.

Services were April 20 at the Heenev-Sundquist Funeral Home in Farmington with burial in Glen Eden Memorial Park in Livonia.

MRS. ELLA HARDING, 75, of Farmington Hills died April 23, 1974, in Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn. She was born Nov. 26, 1898, in New York.

Surviving are son Arthur Blackwell, daughters Mrs. James (Margaret) Stahl of Detroit and Mrs. Gordon (Phyllis) Mathews of Farmington Hills, sisters Mrs. Anna Zinszar and Mrs. Mary Clark, both of New York, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Services were April 26 at the Heenev-Sundquist Funeral Home in Farmington with burial in Glen Eden Memorial Cemetery in Livonia.

FREDERICK HOARD, 21, of Farmington died April 21, 1974, at home. He was born May 18, 1952, in Pontiac.

Surviving are parents Mr. and Mrs. Mayon Hoard of Farmington, brothers Jerry and Robert and sisters Mary and Susan.

Services were April 24 at Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church in Farmington, with burial in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Southfield. Arrangements were by the Heenev-Sundquist Funeral Home.

Larson honored at annual dinner

Charles Larson, Southfield, will be honored at the annual dinner at the Farmington Groves-Walker post of the American Legion for his year of service as state department commander.

The dinner, at 7:30 p.m. May 11, will be held in the American Legion headquarters, 31775 Grand River.

Girl is winner for homemaking

Sharon Lynn Maykovich was selected as one of the top 25 girls in the State of Michigan in the Betty Crocker "search for leadership in family living" contest. This effort is aimed at identifying outstanding students in the broad area of family living.

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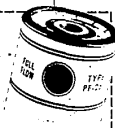


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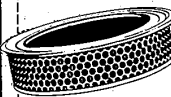
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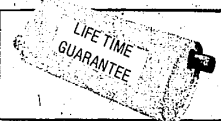
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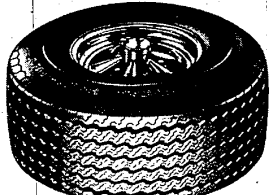
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