



## Sounds help break through silence

Photos by Barb Peters

A nine-year-old girl with animated eyes gazes across the table at Mrs. Margo E. Wilson,

a university speech pathology instructor.

"Chocolate cake," Mrs. Wilson says.

The child's eyes turn away. She smiles shyly, but only makes bizarre noises.

"Chocolate cake," Mrs. Wilson repeats.

Hesitatingly the child says the phrase. For this young girl, saying a two-word phrase is quite an achievement. Before last September when she started working with Mrs. Wilson, she used little meaningful language.

She is just one of eight emotionally disturbed children Mrs. Wilson works with at the Children and Adolescents' Unit of the Nebraska State Hospital in Lincoln. Many of the children Mrs. Wilson sees have little or no speech.

The program at the Children and Adolescents' Unit began last semester. During the fall term, Mrs. Wilson observed and worked with the children while planning to expand the program. This semester several students are helping her enlarge the program, or

are observing therapy as a part of their clinical training.

Mrs. Wilson described her contact with the children as the favorite parts of her week.

"I enjoy most the children in whom I can detect a sense of humor and a desire to learn," she said. "Seeing these kids change and get better is a terrific reward. Helping them requires my own ingenuity."

Mrs. Wilson explained that she first has the non-verbal child comprehend and use single words. Then she progresses to two-word phrases, expressions and sentences. The goal is to teach the child to understand and answer questions.

Her work with the children includes a type of behavior modification. One of the devices Mrs. Wilson uses to achieve this response is a coffee can mailbox. When the child responds correctly to a question about a picture card, he is given the card to drop into the mailbox.

"The child must be rewarded for trying," Mrs. Wilson explained. "Even if it's something as simple as putting a picture card in a coffee can mailbox or putting a piece into a puzzle."

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