

Living laboratory helps handicapped explore abilities

By Amy Lenzen

Three years ago Mary was a young homemaker with a loving husband, a baby girl and new home. Today Mary still is a homemaker with a husband, a child and a home. But a spinal cord injury, suffered in a car accident two years ago, has left Mary paralyzed from the waist down.

The transition to wheelchair confinement was a difficult process.

But, one year and help from the rehabilitation and habilitation area of the College of Home Economics, let Mary move from "an 'I can't' person to an 'I can' person," said Dr. Lois Schwab, director of the rehabilitation area.

"Our aim," said Schwab, "is to help the handicapped find that they have more ability than disability in areas of personal care as well as in social and community living."

Another aim of the program is to achieve those goals without making the cost beyond the reach of the handicapped person or the state or federal program serving them.

"We're seeking solutions that aren't found in the usual way," Schwab said.

One of the methods that the program uses is an independent living laboratory. This comprehensive laboratory serves both as a tool for analyzing the abilities of those who come to the department for help and as a means of demonstrating to others how their lives can be made easier, Schwab said.

Part of the kitchen looks like most other kitchens with the usual cabinets, appliances, and utensils. Another side of the kitchen has been lowered. The cabinets have been lowered for use by persons in wheelchairs. An adjustable counter is used to help the handicapped decide which height is right for his or her size and reach.

"Flexibility is the name of the game," said Schwab. "There is no such thing as a

standardized person. God did not decree that all women are five-foot five for the standardized 36-inch-high kitchen counter."

All else in the kitchen appears typical. But the cookbook on the counter has unusually large type to aid the visually handicapped. A wire circle with spokes actually is a pie-cutting guide. A rolling pin with a handle is much easier for those who can use only one arm.

These utensils help the handicapped live with a minimum of effort, Schwab explained.

The restroom in the corner is designed for quadriplegics. The toilet bowl is raised off the floor. A regular shower is replaced by a hose with a nozzle.

The people that come to the rehabilitation area are sent there by doctors or mental health clinics. Some come on their initiative.

Twelve percent of the population is disabled in some way, Schwab said. Although it has not been verified, that would mean that there are about 180,000 disabled persons in Nebraska. It is estimated that 4 percent of the above population are severely or multiply handicapped, Schwab said.

It is for the later group that the area tries to focus its services, Schwab said.

"We've become the court of last resort for many people who haven't been given a chance elsewhere."

Schwab did not specify the number of people her department helps each year or has helped since its beginning in 1966.

"I don't want to play the numbers game. We are concerned about how far we can move individuals."

One program through which handicapped persons are aided is the Vocational

Services Program. In this program, persons 14 years old or older are given an assessment and training in line with disabilities and capabilities.

After a battery of tests involving many academic departments, a training program is devised. It may be administered either by a social worker or family member if the person lives in another part of the state or by someone in the department if the person lives in Lincoln or the surrounding area.

Another division of the rehabilitation and habilitation area is the teaching department in which students are trained to teach independent living to the handicapped.

This department was the first in the nation to receive funds for training professionals to teach independent living. It has attracted masters degree candidates from across the nation, Schwab said.

One of the most important results of the independent living programs is that the skills learned by the handicapped person can lead to employment, said Schwab.

Using Mary as an example, Schwab said, "Mary became the wife and mother she wanted to be. She has remodeled her home. Her abilities were accented."

"We work to be a force in helping thousands claim their right to live as freely, creatively and responsibly as possible."

GLC voter registration drive scheduled for end of March

The ASUN Liaison Committee will have a voter registration drive in March for the Nebraska primary election.

Terri Carver, a UNL sophomore and GLC spokesman said booths will be set up March 29-30 in the Nebraska Union, and March 31 in the East Union. Students may register at these booths from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Carver said GLC wants all eligible students to register for the May primary and November general election.

"But we also want students to get out there and vote," Carver said.

A spokesman for Lancaster Election Commission said that to be eligible to vote in the May primary one must be a U.S. citizen and 18 years old by May 9.

The spokesman, who refused to be identified, said only those registered in Lancaster County may vote in Lancaster County.

If a student is not a legal resident of Lancaster County he must write to his home county to register. If he is already

registered and interested in voting in the May primary, he must request ballots from the county clerk.

Requests for absentee ballots have been honored since February.

A student already registered in his home county, but interested in changing counties, must change his legal address to his present address.

"Most students keep their home addresses as their legal addresses because their parents claim them as dependents, and they (the students) wouldn't have to change their addresses on their registration form every time they moved in Lincoln," said the spokesman.

Nebraska statutes require voters be registered by the second Friday before the election. To vote in the May primary one must register by April 28.

The LEC spokesman said one need not register for the primary to vote in the general election, but if one registers as an independent, he is not eligible to vote in the primary.

Area quakes concern few

Every few weeks Nebraska experiences an earthquake registering about 2 on the Richter scale, said Dr. Russel Smith associate geology professor. A number 2 quake is the smallest normally felt by humans.

Nebraska is in a moderate earthquake zone, Smith said. The Humboldt Fault, a major fault, runs from southeast Nebraska to central Oklahoma.

"It is quite possible that we could have an earthquake at any time," Smith said. "There are no warnings. However it is unlikely that we would have one of magnitude 8," Smith said.

The Richter scale gauges the energy released by an earthquake as measured by ground motion. Each increase of one number means ten times greater ground motion. There is no upper limit and the highest recorded is 8.9

Nebraska's largest recorded earthquake was in Tecumseh in 1935 and had a magnitude of about 4. It caused moderate damage. Missouri measured the largest earthquake in the area in 1811. The quake

was felt as far as St. Louis and Memphis and caused the Mississippi River to change course.

These quakes compare with a death total of 830,000 in China in 1556 or, the largest U.S. quake which occurred in San Francisco killing 700 and rating 8.3 on the Richter Scale.

Earthquakes can happen anywhere. There are few places absolutely free of them, Smith said.

"It's a vibration which affects everything but you only notice it for a few seconds," Smith said. The best thing to do in an earthquake is to stay put, Smith said, adding that people tend to rush into the streets which is the worst thing to do.

Smith advised people caught in the street during a quake to step into a doorway to shield themselves from falling glass. He said people caught in cars should stop the vehicle but remain inside.

The idea of a major earthquake occurring in Nebraska is not absurd, however the chances are slim, Smith said. "I personally feel safe here, safer than in most places," he said.



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