

Afflicted child is taught to reach potential

By Kathryn Haugstatter

Abby is beautiful and she knows it. As her eyes play peek-a-boo, she dares you not to grin back at her. Not one word is said, but much is communicated. This 17-month-old charmer has an enormous ability to make friends.

Abby also has Down's Syndrome. It is known by another name—mongolism. It means those twinkling eyes are slightly slanted, the forehead is flat. The fingers reaching for another Cheerio are stubby. And no words are spoken because she can't talk yet. She's mentally retarded.

Abby has respiratory problems so the house must be kept very humid and her mattress tilted. A special cream is rubbed on her three times a day to treat her extremely dry skin. She has a hearing loss in both ears that was only recently discovered and a partially-cleft palate.

Heart trouble

But Abby's mother, Elaine Rod, says she's very lucky. Many children with Down's Syndrome have heart problems, but Abby doesn't. Many of them do not get the help they need when they need it.

Abby has been in school since she was three weeks old. As a result, Rod said her development has been near normal.

Abby was born in Ann Arbor, Mich. Her doctor noticed something different about the way she looked and ordered chromosome tests.

The tests showed that Abby had 47 chromosomes instead of the normal 46. The normal human cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes. Instead of containing two chromosomes in the 21st pair, Abby's cells contain three. The result is called Down's Syndrome.

Emotional support

The doctor called his former nurse who had a mongoloid baby. She went to see Rod, gave her lists of people to call for help and called some of them for her. She tried to answer questions Rod had and gave her emotional support.

Federal law requires all states to provide

education for handicapped children from the age of three to 21. Michigan and Nebraska have gone beyond that, providing education from the time of diagnosis.

Rod said a baby's first three years are vitally important. All children need stimulation when they're young to help them develop properly. It is even more important for the handicapped children, she said.

Rod, her husband and 10-year-old daughter Tanya moved to Nebraska last August shortly before she began teaching speech classes at UNL. About that time Janet and Mike Ansell moved to Lincoln from Omaha.

Pilot Parents

The Ansell's had belonged to an organization in Omaha called Pilot Parents Program. This group, which formed several years ago, consists of parents of handicapped children who have been trained to help parents who have recently learned their child has a disability.

The Ansell's started the program here, but had to move again. So Rod took over the chairmanship.

There are now six trained couples in the program. All of them have a child who is physically or mentally handicapped or both.

Rod said the group offers the emotional support and understanding that can only come when you've raised a handicapped child. The group also provides factual information about the various disabilities and the medical services, educational programs and supportive agencies that are available, she said.

Rod said the group has been asked to give in-service programs for medical personnel at various Lincoln hospitals. Lea Eunice, assistant professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Nursing, requested a two-hour course on emotional adjustment to the handicap experience for the nursing program at UNL in February.

In the cold

Professional people involved with the handicapped will be invited to attend an in-

formation night in February to learn how to make things easier for the parent of a handicapped child. Another special event will involve brothers and sisters of handicapped children, who "often feel left out in the cold," Rod said.

Abby lets Rod know she wants another Cheerio. An occupational therapist recommended them because grasping the round shape helps develop the grip.

Almost everything Abby does is geared toward fulfilling her potential. She attends school from eight-thirty to three, Monday through Friday at the Child Development Center at Trinity Methodist Church.

The Rods won't know for several years how much Abby's mental growth has been retarded. Rod said mongoloid children used to be considered uneducatable but early diagnosis and special education has

changed the future for these children.

When Rod takes Abby outside the house, people stare at her. They know something isn't quite right, but they are afraid to say anything, she said.

"Parents who take their children into the community must feel okay about it. People shouldn't be afraid to come up to them and say 'that's a cute baby, I was wondering, is there a problem?' People are relieved to know and talk about it," Rod said.

If your child is handicapped, he or she needs all the help they can get. As parents or grandparents, you also need help. The members of Pilot Parents Program can't call you, you must call them.

The program is affiliated with the Capital Association for Retarded Citizens. The phone number is 477-6925. Elaine Rod's number is 483-1238.

International House paper well received by residents

International House has broadened its scope of activities with the addition of a monthly newspaper entitled *the paper*.

The first edition was published Nov. 15 and because of favorable response, publication will continue into second semester, said Prabha Unnithan, editor of *the paper*.

About 50 copies are circulated to house residents, International Educational Services, the Office of University Housing and others associated with the house, Unnithan said.

International House, located in Neihardt Residence Hall, is a "small community," Unnithan said. Half of the 72 students who live in the house are from foreign countries.

The purpose of *the paper* is to get residents involved in the house, said Unnithan, a native of Malaysia. It also enables them to learn more about its residents.

The idea of a newspaper was mentioned during a meeting of International House students, Unnithan said.

"We got a tremendous response," he said, adding that 47 people suggested a

name for the newspaper. *The paper* was selected because of a desire for simplicity, he said.

Unnithan, a graduate student in sociology, said he became editor because of his interest in journalism.

The paper is financed by money set aside by the housing office for special activities, he said. Though he didn't know the cost of putting out an issue, Unnithan said the writing, editing, typing and photocopying is done entirely by residents.

There are five staff members, he said, but some articles are written by non-staff members who volunteer to contribute. Staff and writers may differ from issue to issue in an attempt to get more people involved, Unnithan said.

To determine what should be covered in *the paper*, the staff must "keep tabs on what's going on" within the house, he said. About 10 days before deadline the staff meets to decide what articles should be written.

Unnithan said *the paper* tries to cover achievements of house residents, house activities and information about different residents and their country.

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