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New living center teaches independence to disabled



photo by Mary Ellen Behne

During the Independent Living Center's open house Thursday, Renee Kriegshauser, accessibility specialist, shows Jack Swenson, 5045 Holdrege St., features of the barrier-free model kitchen for disabled people.

BY LORI MERRYMAN

Ten Lincoln disabled persons started an organization in 1961 to help themselves, and now, 20 years and 50 members later, the group helps over 400 disabled persons.

The group, the League of Human Dignity, strives to fully integrate disabled persons into society. Their newest offspring, the Independent Living Center, 1423 O St., opened last week.

The purpose of the living center is to help disabled persons become independent in their environment, Nancy Erickson, project coordinator for the center, said.

The center provides counseling, training, information, wheelchair repair — all things to help the disabled person become more independent.

The eight staff persons (five have disabilities) at the Independent Living Center work one-to-one with people using their services.

Learning independence

Erickson, disabled by polio when six years-old, said many disabled people can't live independently because they have never learned how.

Teaching the people to become independent can involve lessons in transportation, homemaking, personal care, finances, laundry, balancing a checkbook, sexuality and social interaction, she said.

Someone who is coming out of a nursing home after

several years may not know how to balance a checkbook, she said.

Through classes and counseling, the center "takes life and breaks it down," and in some cases at "square one," she said.

A major problem for disabled people is in finding and keeping attendants, Erickson said.

Training is made available at the center for hiring an attendant, talking about wages and informing the attendants of the person's needs.

As independent people, interviewing and hiring attendants is something they'll have to do by themselves for the rest of their lives, so training is necessary, Erickson said.

Model home

Although the center counsels, it also gives concrete proof that people can live in a physically barrier-free environment.

The top floor or the two story center building is a model home demonstrating to architects, companies, disabled and able people that homes and buildings can easily be "barrier free."

The model home includes a kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and library completely suited for a disabled person.

Someone in a wheelchair, for example, could easily take objects off the kitchen shelves. The sink is lower and a wheelchair will fit under it like a table and chair. The dishwasher and washing machine are both front loading.

Everything in the modern, attractive model kitchen is accessible to someone in a wheelchair.

Most of the changes are "things you don't think about" being an inconvenience, but really interfere with a disabled persons independence, she said.

The center provides equipment repair which helps minimize the time people can't be mobile. The service is "fast and efficient" and offered at lower rates, Erickson said.

All of the center's services are intended to help people overcome their physical barriers and restraints placed on them by society, she said.

Surroundings inhibit

Your physical environment dictates how independent you will be," she said.

The City of Lincoln has been very good about putting in curb cuts and making public buildings convenient for disabled people, Erickson said.

But in private homes, disabled people have not been as lucky.

Builders don't feel there's a large enough market to build accessible houses, so they haven't, she said.

But things are slowly changing, she said. She predicts that within two years there will be barrier-free apartments in Lincoln.

"I like to call able people currently mobile people," because they don't know when they might suddenly be disabled, she said.

Attitudes changing

Within the past few years disabled people have become more assertive of their needs and rights, she said. They're no longer as afraid of what people will think of their disability.

But there still remains a fear of people's reactions to their disability, she said.

For Erickson, it was a matter of deciding "I've got a right to be there, too."

While going through the Centrum Shopping Center, she said, saw a great sign of the times — two blind people talking, and someone in a wheelchair. It was something one wouldn't have seen ten years ago, she said.

Although the living center, in its second week, serves 40 people, Erickson said she expects more people to use their services as federal and state programs are cut.

The center is funded through a Community Development Block Grant and revenue sharing funds through city and county.

Erickson said she hopes the center is independent of any federal funding in three years.

She said this could be accomplished by developing foundation funding and possibly charging for some of the services.

So far, the center has been "unimaginative" in funding, she said, but this will change as the "people in Washington" make more cuts in aid to disabled and veterans programs.

Whitlatch: U.S. arms hurting chances for peace

BY LORI MERRYMAN

American politics is promoting extremism on all sides in the Middle East conflict, said Corrine Whitlatch, program director for the American Friends Service Commission in Des Moines, Iowa.

Whitlatch spoke on "Is Peace Possible in the Holy Land" Saturday at St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

The United States is selling arms — planes that fly 30,000 mph in a country 30 miles wide — to both parties in the conflict, she said.

Selling arms to both sides (the Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews) can only result in more fighting, she said.

The United States is wrong in supplying the arms and then saying "you can have the arms but you have to use them in self-defense," Whitlatch said.

"How we can expect that to hold up is ridiculous," she said.

"We should demand our government and arms manufacturers to quit the damage. We can't buy peace to the Middle East but we can allow people to live longer."

She said she is bothered because the American people have given up on any peace in the Middle East. Americans are saying they're tired of "those people" fighting so long and think they really like to fight, said Whitlatch, who was in the Middle East last spring and is now giving her message to Americans for the Friends (Quakers).

The Friends have helped both Palestinians and Israelis for 35 years.

She said, "Let me begin to tell you that these people want peace. We must never believe that life is cheap there."

Central to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict are their national claims to the same land, she said. On that land, Israel has build a sovereign state and Palestinians aspire to build one. Each is consequently seeking secure, recognized boundaries.

Both nations are occupying the land. A major concern now is the West Bank, another example of the Israelis' ability to move in and take over more of the land, she said.

The major political parties in Israel are war parties interested in taking over

and moving in more Israelis, she said.

But she listed extensive groups and people in Israel who want to make peace with the Palestinians.

A representative from Peace Now, a broadly based Israeli group, told her "peace is greater than greater Israel." And this is the underlying thought for many Israelis.

These groups believe holding the West Bank harms Israel, she said.

Yet the Israeli government continues to confiscate more land on the West Bank for settlements. The Israelis want the West Bank for two reasons — security, and they feel the West Bank is part of their promised land, Whitlatch said.

continued, page 2.

Classes to be held July 3

A quirk in the calendar has presented an unusual situation this summer. Although university offices will be closed July 3, students and faculty will meet for classes.

Robert Patterson, associate director of summer sessions, said that instead of scheduling an additional Saturday makeup class, it was decided that classes would be held Friday.

The offices will be closed Friday because it is the regular scheduled holiday for hourly wage employees, Patterson said. Even if the university had decided to grant students Friday off and schedule

a make-up Saturday, office personnel would not have been required to work that Saturday, he added.

The Nebraska Union will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Friday. The East Union will be closed. Union food services and offices will be closed except for the Bakery which will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

The University Health Center will be staffed only by a nurse and orderly on Friday with a doctor on call for emergencies.