

DECENTRALIZED COMMUNITY SPECIAL LEARNING CENTERS

FOR

TRAINABLE MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN

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GENERAL CONCEPT FOR DECENTRALIZED COMMUNITY  
SPECIAL LEARNING CENTERS  
FOR TRAINABLE MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN

The need for special learning programs to meet the needs of physically and mentally handicapped children is a cause of concern for parents and residents in many Economic Opportunity Atlanta Target communities. Many of these children do not meet the criteria for admission to the two programs provided by the Atlanta City Schools. Even those who are eligible to attend public school still have the difficulty of transportation - lack of economic resources, and need for constant supervision. Enrollment in private schools in the area present the same problems even when tuition is arranged for through scholarships. Parents are unable to pay the cost of transportation necessary for their children to attend school.

The concept presented here seeks to point to directions a program might take which would provide a practical learning program on a neighborhood level. Two ideas are basic to this concept -

- (1) The handicapped child is entitled to educational services within his own neighborhood, and
- (2) any program which offers a meaningful service to both parents and children must be one in which parents are genuinely involved in its policy-making and administration.

Primarily the concept is a developmental process of impacting parents and the handicapped children with the potential of life within the context of the child's given limitations. In operation this concept might look like several on-going learning settings for parents, children and staff.

The ideal setting for such a program would be a house in the neighborhood rented or purchased, renovated and furnished to teach the life styles practicable for the trainable mentally retarded. However, due to the economic limitation which exist at present, an apartment in

a public housing project or space in a neighborhood church should prove adequate for small neighborhood projects.

"The following proposal was designed with the hope of developing a program which with modification of the number of children, staff and housing facility, could be sponsored by any Neighborhood Service Center."

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## PHILSOPHY of EDUCATION for the MENTALLY RETARDED

All children are entitled to an education with the opportunity to develop to the limits of their individual capacity. In this respect, education for the mentally retarded does not differ from education for any group of children. The goals are the same: to teach the individual to make full use of his capabilities, and to become a useful member of his social group (i.e. all others).

In analyzing the concept of social competence, self-expression and self-control are the primary traits of outstanding importance. To be able to express one's ideas in work and in play, to other individuals and to groups, is a necessary requisite for happiness and efficiency. Even more important is the ability to control one's self, in accordance with socially accepted standards of behavior. Self-expression without self-control leads to chaos and confusion. With all the need for the child to express himself, it should not be forgotten that unless at the same time he learns self-discipline to control himself, he will not have fulfilled his capabilities. If the mentally retarded child is to assume a place in the community with a measure of self-reliance and self-respect, it becomes necessary for education to provide training for some participation in productive work and to plan teaching procedures and objectives to correspond with his needs, interests, abilities and limitations. This is the basic philosophy underlying any educational planning for the mentally retarded child.

The parents of the mentally retarded are also entitled to an education which will enable them to better understand their child. By participating in the program, parents will learn different ways of coping with the problems that arise in daily living. The parent-child relationship should

improve when the parent is relieved of the constant supervision of a mentally retarded child. The attitude of a parent toward his child might change if he understands that mental retardation can occur in any family, and that the mentally retarded can learn some things which will benefit him, particularly in the area of self-care.

Representatives of the National Association for Retarded Children, The Georgia Association for Retarded Children, and the Atlanta Association for Retarded Children have all expressed an interest in and a desire to work with all parents who wish to avail themselves of their respective services. Organizations such as these should be the primary source of support for parents. Membership fees are modest and the security derived from belonging to a large group with similar problems and interests is highly satisfactory.

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## PLAN OF ACTION

### I. Identification

Families having a retarded member in need of community services can be identified by the Neighborhood Aides in their regular contact with target area families. The McBee System record should also provide this identification. A community survey under the supervision of University personnel is still another method of identification. Information should include name of family, name, age and sex of child; previous community services (if any) received by child, i.e., medical and/or psychological evaluations, Grady Hospital ID number, local Health Center record and neighborhood or community program attended if any, by child. Parental attitude toward child should also be obtained (do parents feel child can be helped; what kinds of services do their children need, etc.)

### II. Presentation to CNAC

- (a) Scope of problem.
- (b) Plans for parent discussion group.
- (c) Progress reports should be made to the CNAC on a continuing basis.

Initial discussion should be held with parents covering the following areas:

- (a) Problems involved in obtaining services for mentally retarded children.
- (b) Community services available for the mentally retarded.
- (c) Program structure for parents.

Through weekly meetings with resource persons, parents can learn many of the facts regarding mental retardation and may, in turn, become resource persons themselves to their friends and neighbors. Knowledge of facts can go a long way toward dissipating myths and superstitions surrounding the mentally handicapped.

### III. Project Structure

A possible structure for administering a project such as the one proposed could be an incorporated group of citizens seeking funds and acting as the grantee. This group would consist of perhaps four residents of the target community being served, three or four resource experts in the fields of health, special education, and social services, and four parents elected by the parents themselves to represent them on an annual basis. Legal assistance in establishing necessary agency status should be sought from the Legal Aid Society office in the target community. An alternative to this arrangement could be with EOA acting as the grantee with a Board of Advisors composed of the above mentioned persons.

One adult resident of the target area should be chosen by the parents to direct the activities of the program. This person should enroll in the Child Growth and Development course taught at Atlanta Area Tech. This is a ten week course in the physical, mental, emotional and social growth and development of normal children. Registration fee is \$5.00; class meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 to 3:30 P.M. After completing this course, a two-week observation at a local facility for trainable mentally retarded children will prove most profitable.

A neighborhood learning center will provide excellent training opportunities for Neighborhood Youth Corps workers. Three such persons should be provided for each group of fifteen children and each enrolled in the Child Growth & Development course offered at Atlanta Area Tech.

The staff members and NYC trainees could serve as resources to the parents in helping them to better understand their own children's problems, behavior, and possibilities for development. Together parents and staff

could plan learning activities in self-care skills for the children. The children should be grouped according to their particular needs and capabilities. Staff and parents could also seek to understand better how to help the child at home so as to utilize more fully the attention received in the learning activities which take place at the center. These learning activities would be directed toward any and all kinds of areas the child needs (e.g. self-care skills, recreation, social interaction, academic work, imaginal education).

Underlying the program would always be the idea that both child and parent could see themselves as significant human beings for whom possibilities are open to play a meaningful part in the life of their neighborhood, community and the world.

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Program Account Form

I. PURPOSE

A. To provide educational services for trainable mentally retarded children and their parents in their own neighborhood for an eleven-month period.

B. Objectives

1. To provide a facility in which moderately retarded children and their parents may receive assistance in developing ways of coping with daily living problems.
2. To provide for the training and education of each child to the maximum of his potential for health, educational, emotional and social growth and development.
3. To provide continuous evaluation of progress made by each child in each area of development.
4. To aid parents in understanding the problems which arise from having a mentally retarded child in the family through group meetings and home visits which offer counseling and guidance, and referral services.
5. To aid parents in developing positive attitudes toward health care and utilizing health services available to them.
6. To maintain continuous contact with parents and assist them in putting into practice those things learned through group meetings.
7. To develop a system of record keeping which will accurately reflect progress made by child and parents.

II. PROGRAM

A. Children

1. This program will serve fifteen (15) moderately retarded children between the ages of six (6) and twenty-one (21) years who are not presently receiving educational services from any source.
2. The program will operate from nine (9:00) A. M. to two (2:00) P. M. five days a week, Monday through Friday.
3. Children will be grouped according to age and educational needs.
4. Core content of the program will be centered around behavior modification which will enable the child to relate positively to his family, peer group, neighborhood and community.
5. Recreation and learning tasks will be provided to develop self-awareness, self-control and self-care.
6. Basic academic instruction will be offered to children possessing the necessary intellectual potential to benefit.
7. Special health problems of individual children will be referred to the appropriate agency.

B. Parents

1. Organize parent workshops to meet on a regular basis to design a program for themselves.
2. Provide instruction to parents to help them in understanding the nature of mental retardation and the special needs of their children.

3. Introduce the concept of behavior modification and emphasize the benefits which can be derived from its use by both the child and his family.
4. Provide instruction in home management, family planning, hygiene and nutrition.
5. Referral to other agencies for unmet needs in health, welfare, vocational counseling and education.
6. Group recreational activities planned by parents and volunteers.
7. Involve parents in planning learning tasks for children to carry out goals of their program.

### III. PARTICIPANTS

- A. Children will be recruited through the EOA Center staff, welfare workers, public health nurses, and school counselors.
- B. Criteria for Selection
  1. Child must not be currently enrolled in an educational program.
  2. Child must be ambulatory.

### IV. RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

- A. CNAC general advisory board will work with the Center sub-committees on education and health.
- B. Parent Workshop group will seek to involve CNAC members and members of the two sub-committees in setting general goals and objectives for the program.
- C. Involve parents in developing specific educational, recreational and social learning tasks.

V. COORDINATION

A. Other agencies involved in a program such as this will include State and County Departments of Family and Children Services, State and County Departments of Public Health, Georgia State Department of Education - Special Education Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and local school systems.

B. Funding

Funds and services will be requested from the following community organizations:

1. Civic Organizations - Civitans (local), Lions Clubs, Masons, Kiwanis and Jaycees
2. Church Groups - Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta, Inc.
3. EOA - Neighborhood Youth Corps trainees, bookkeeping services, bus drivers, transportation supervisors and Social Services.
4. USDA - Commodities, supplementary funds for snacks and hot lunches.
5. "Start Now Atlanta" - Volunteers to work with children, siblings and parents in recreation and family counseling (preferably graduate students from local institutional departments of Education, Psychology, Physical Education, Sociology and Social Work).

C. This program will focus on parent-child relationships, education for daily living, and home situations.

1. Parent-child group meeting at least once a week.
2. Parents to attend daily classes as volunteer workers and as observers.
3. Counseling for child's siblings to promote better understanding on their part of the MR relative.

VI. EVALUATION

- A. Children could be evaluated by parents regarding changes in behavior.
- B. Staff could evaluate child's progress in relation to his peer group.

- C. Volunteers could assess child's progress in recreation and social interaction and offer suggestions for additional appropriate activities.

The Program should help the child to become aware of himself as a worthwhile individual, develop academic skills to the best of his ability, become socially acceptable, develop the mechanical and intellectual skills necessary to function in society and help him develop his ability to participate constructively in society. The Program should also increase the effectiveness of intrafamily relationships and add to the general family stability.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Facility

May be located in a house, an apartment in a low-cost housing project, a day care center, the educational facilities of a neighborhood church or public school. It should not be difficult to provide space for a small group of from twelve (12) to fifteen (15) children in any of the target area neighborhoods of Atlanta. Accommodations should conform as closely as possible with required standards of the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services in to insure maximum health and comfort of children.

B. Staff

All of the staff will be recruited from the target area in which the students resides. All staff members who work directly with the children will either have had formal course work in Child Care or be currently enrolled in such a program. The cost of the program to funding agencies will vary depending upon the value of volunteer work done and salaries financed from other sources.

<u>Staffing Costs</u>	<u>Salary</u>
1 Older Adult-----	\$3,328
3 NYC Trainees-----	7,488
1 Bus and Driver-----	4,280
1 Cook-----	1,820
Space Rental-----	varied
Utilities-----	170
Transportation Maintenance-----	900
Social Security & Workmen Compensation -----	277
TOTAL-----	\$18,263

Salaries for the NYC trainees are paid by the United States Department of Labor. Driving of the bus and supervision of the children en route to and from school could be services donated by parents. Parents could also volunteer to prepare and serve one hot meal each day. If program is located in a low-cost public housing authority the Atlanta Housing Authority could be asked to provide space on a one dollar per year basis.

With NYC salaries and volunteer service costs deducted from the total budget, a small neighborhood program for mentally retarded children could be operated at a cost of approximately \$5,675 per year.

According to figures supplied by the Georgia Department of Public Health, the cost of caring for the mentally retarded in other programs around the state are as follows:

<u>Program</u>	<u>Cost per retardate per year</u>
Residential (Gracewood) -----	\$3,183
Special Education (EMR) -----	615
Special Education (TMR) -----	1,000
All Other Community Programs -----	1,000

With a new approach effectively utilizing the services of parents, volunteers and Neighborhood Service Centers personnel not usually considered suitable for this type of employment, the cost per retardate per year would be approximately \$378. Even if some of the services should have to be purchased from

parents or other target area residents, the cost per child per year should still be less than the cost of maintaining one educable mentally retarded child in a public school special education class.

C. Equipment and Supplies

Some of these materials will be provided by the Neighborhood Service Center. It is expected that most of the additional needed supplies will be made and furnished by parents. Purchase of necessary materials will be financed through miscellaneous costs and funds raising endeavors of the parent group for the Parent Fund.

D. Food, Paper Products, Cleaning Supplies

1. Surplus commodities
2. USDA supplementary foods funds
3. Parents Fund