

We are all unique individuals..



Story - Ruby Cooper

Photography - Ken Davidson

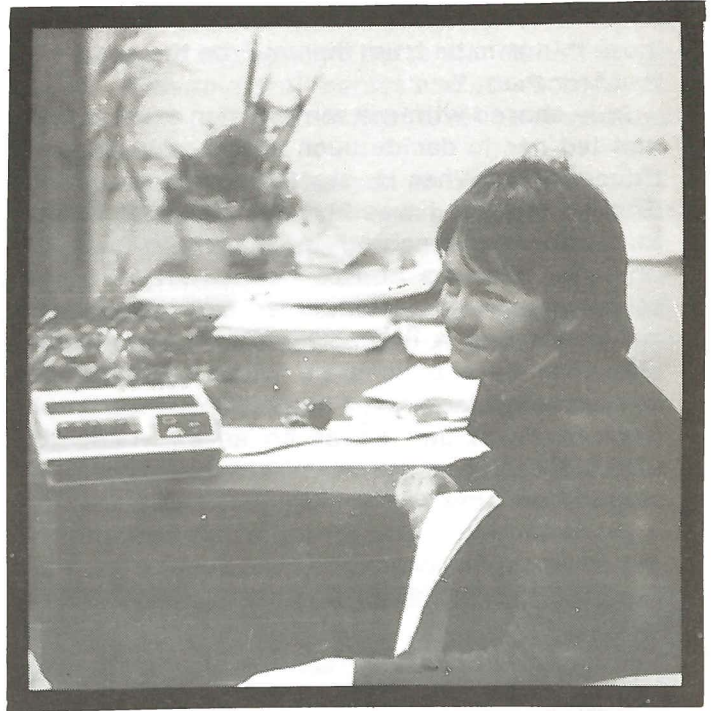
My interests in working with handicapped children led me to arrange an interview with Judy Walden, who is the Program Director of the Paraprofessional and Special Education Training Program at the Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) in Steamboat Springs. In addition to talking with Judy, I sought additional information from Roger Reynolds, the Instructor at the Discovery Center; Ian Payton, the Instructor of Special Education at CNCC and Debbie Hazelbaker, a student at CNCC training in the program.

Judy Walden established Steamboat's paraprofessional program, located at the Alpine Campus. She was also responsible in starting the Discovery Center, where the college students have inservice training. The Discovery Center opened to assure that each student is given a chance to be able to work with kids. Every day between the hours of 3:30 and 6:30, children come to the lab school which is located at 718 Oak Street. The kids work with the college students on a one to one basis. The kind of activities at the Discovery Center include tutoring, scheduled outdoor activities, snacks and exercises. These begin at 4:00 and continue until the child goes home.

A Paraprofessional in Special Education is a person who is trained to give direct service to a child or adult who has special educational needs. There are two programs available in the study of Paraprofessionalism. Each program is nine months long, divided into two semesters. Completion of the first program gives the student 32 credits and completion of the second gives 26 credits and an Associate Degree in Special Education.

Some of the courses studied are: 1) Introduction to the Education of Exceptional Children and Adults, which is a survey of the characteristics and educational needs of handicapped and gifted individuals; 2) Manual Communication, which is designed to teach students to communicate with American Sign Language and finger spelling; 3) Educating the Gifted and Talented, which is a program for instructing preschool, disabled, disadvantaged and culturally different gifted students.

The program is vocationally funded, which means that they are not trying to give people the same kind of education that a professional teacher receives. They are training people to do the specific things that have to be done. After completing the first year program you will receive a certificate entitled, "Paraprofessional in Special Education." Then if the student wishes to continue the program, he or she will receive a certificate entitled, "Career Associate in Special Education", after completing the second year of course work.



Judy Walden - Program Director of the Paraprofessional Program

"Special Ed is a huge field," explained Judy. "The Paraprofessional program gives you an opportunity to get your feet wet and find out what areas within the field you want to pursue. Knowing you can't do everything, you need to train yourself in one specific area. Special Education is looking at each individual child or adult and saying, 'What are their strengths and weaknesses? What can we do in terms of education to help them grow to their full potential?' Traditionally, in Special Ed, we have been thought to work only with retarded children. However, that has expanded to the point where presently, regular teachers in the state of Colorado are required to have some course work in Special Education to renew their certificates, because whether a child is learning disabled, gifted or 'just a regular kid', everybody deserves special attention. We are all unique individuals and we all deserve to have our education geared to our individual strengths and weaknesses. It's the same kind of thing that Three Wire Winter is about. You're all dealing with your strengths, interests, in terms of growing to your full potential and that is precisely what Special Education is about. I am not a believer in starting something and sticking with it, by God, to the finish, like it or not. There are people who discover that they are no good in human services or that they can't stand to have to be some place on time every day, five days a

week, or that it is hard for them to take directions from somebody else. If they find some of those things to be true, then maybe the program is not for them."

Judy shared with me some of her experiences that led her to decide upon a degree in Special Education, "When I started working as an English teacher I was 21 years old. I had done some student teaching in the south side of Chicago, this was in 1966. It was an all black school and I was accompanied from the time I got off the bus in the morning until I left in the afternoon by a policeman, which was just incomprehensible to me. I had come from a small town in Iowa, and I was on an experimental urban teaching program. When I finished my student teaching I went to Denver and asked for a job in the inner-city, because that's what this experimental program had been about.



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"I was assigned to a junior high in the Five Points area of Denver. The first day I got my schedule and saw what I would be teaching, it looked like a regular English teaching schedule. I had two classes of seventh grade English, two classes of eighth grade English and two ninth grade classes entitled, 'Reading Improvement.' The first class I had was the ninth grade Reading Improvement class. I walked (all five foot, one hundred pounds of me) into my class and it was just full of monstrously big kids. I had to be the smallest person there and they were all slouched

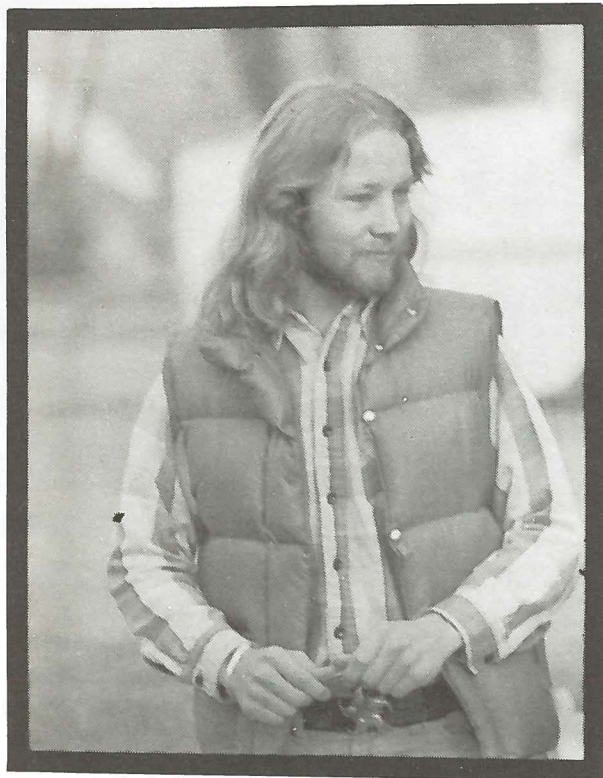
down in their seats and I said, 'Good Morning.' They all waited a minute and kind of looked at each other and then said in unison, 'Hi, Judy.' That was my introduction for the year. That's basically where my interest in Special Ed started because ninth grade Reading Improvement meant they were in the ninth grade, and they could read nothing. Some of them couldn't even write their own names. They had been passed from class to class and they had no reading or writing skills.

"At that point in time my interest with kids who were basically bright but didn't have academic skills started. That's how I got moving from being an English teacher to being in Special Education. Then, after two years there I was weary and felt like every creative bone in my body was just exhausted. I had used up all my creativity and my teaching energy, so I decided it was time to take a break and go back to school. I went into guidance counseling and dropped out of that program because I didn't feel it was good. I went into a Masters program and somehow ended up in New York City.

"That summer I was hired to what was called an experimental reading program in outdoor education. It was at a camp in upstate New York. I had children between the ages of eight and fourteen who again were non-readers. They all lived in Harlem in New York City and came up to this camp every summer. I had these kids all afternoon every day, and I was supposed to improve their reading skills. Well, as you can guess, reading was the furthest thing from their minds. They wanted to go out in the woods and raise hell and play games and do what everyone else was doing, so I used what was called the language experience approach. This means you read about and write about such things that you have actually experienced. We spent an entire summer catching frogs, picking blueberries and hiking up mountains. If we were catching frogs, I would carry along books in my knapsack that had to do with frogs. After they spent an hour and a half catching frogs I would spend five minutes hauling the book out and saying, 'At what stage of development is this frog?' Just putting a little bit of reading here, there and everywhere. We would go back to the camp and write stories about it. It was mostly experience and not very much reading and then the kids went home after eight weeks. Of course, I had a wonderful time and was feeling a little bit guilty about how much fun we had and how little reading we did together.

"The second part of my job was to go back in January to Harlem and talk to the parents and teachers and find out if indeed these kids had learned to read any better by spending eight weeks with me in the woods. Lo and behold, 100

percent of the kids were reading at least one grade level higher in school, their attitudes had improved, they liked school better, and they felt better about themselves. It was probably one of the most satisfying educational experiences that I've had."



**Roger Reynolds - Instructor at the
Discovery Center**

After getting some insight into the program, Judy suggested I visit the Discovery Center and talk to Roger Reynolds, the instructor at that facility. He is a vocational and certified instructor. Most of the kids attending the Center where Roger works are just "normal kids". There are some kids who are gifted who have special talents. There are some kids who have needs for emotional growth and also kids who have learning disabilities. Roger told me that the goals of the Center are, "Both to help the children with the strengths and weaknesses and to assist each individual child in gaining self actualization. We're trying to gear it towards each child and what they need. My general philosophy is to try not to get in their way and let them learn what they want."

He started working with kids in 1974 as a child care worker at a psychiatric hospital for emotionally disturbed children. Roger related an experience that he had while he was there, "One person that I worked with was an eight year old young man from Massachusetts, who at the age of seven had premeditated the murder of his girlfriend because she had told lies about him in school. He went through with the very violent

death of this young girl and as a result of this action ended up being hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital. This young man was one of the finest kids I have ever worked with. Those of us who worked with him were never able to come to a conclusion as to why he did what he did. One of the major things that we considered was whether he had a realistic concept of death. It is pretty hard for a seven year old to really know what happens when someone dies and realize how final it is. He spent a year and a half working with me, a psychologist and a couple of social workers. He came from a real good home that as a result of the murder, or I don't know if you could call it murder, as I said he didn't have the concept of death, but as a result of that occurrence his family broke up. It was very difficult for them to live in the same town with people who knew what had happened. This caused a lot of problems for him in the end. Not only did he have to leave his family and be hospitalized on an island two hundred miles away, but his mother and father split up as well.

"After about a year and a half of working with him, the whole treatment team felt that he was ready to leave the hospital and rejoin his mother and try to make it again in the community. It was real satisfying to me that we had enough power and that the community was accepting enough to allow this young man back into society at the age of nine years old instead of keeping him in a system where he would continue to be labelled as some kind of deviant. That was a real nice success story for me.

"Another situation that I was involved in last year that didn't work so well was an eighteen year old man who was in the program for severely retarded individuals. A very sensitive bright young man, he was retarded but he had good skills. I considered him capable of employment and independent living. He could handle Mass Transit systems in Denver so he was able to get around alone. A lot of us spent time working with him, helping to build his self esteem and control his anger. We worked mainly in the area of building confidence in himself and seeing himself as an independent person. Things would go real well at the school and anything connected with the school. He was always responsible and very respectable. The difficulty was that when he would go home or when there was a conflict between his parents, he would get caught in the middle of it and become very unstable. He ran away from home periodically and would become violently aggressive in the neighborhood. This kind of behavior was mainly a result of things not being comfortable for him at home. We tried therapy with the entire family and individual counseling with each of the parents. It seemed that no matter how much input we gave this family, the husband and wife

were just not able to work together for the benefit of the children. This young man suffered greatly as a result of that.

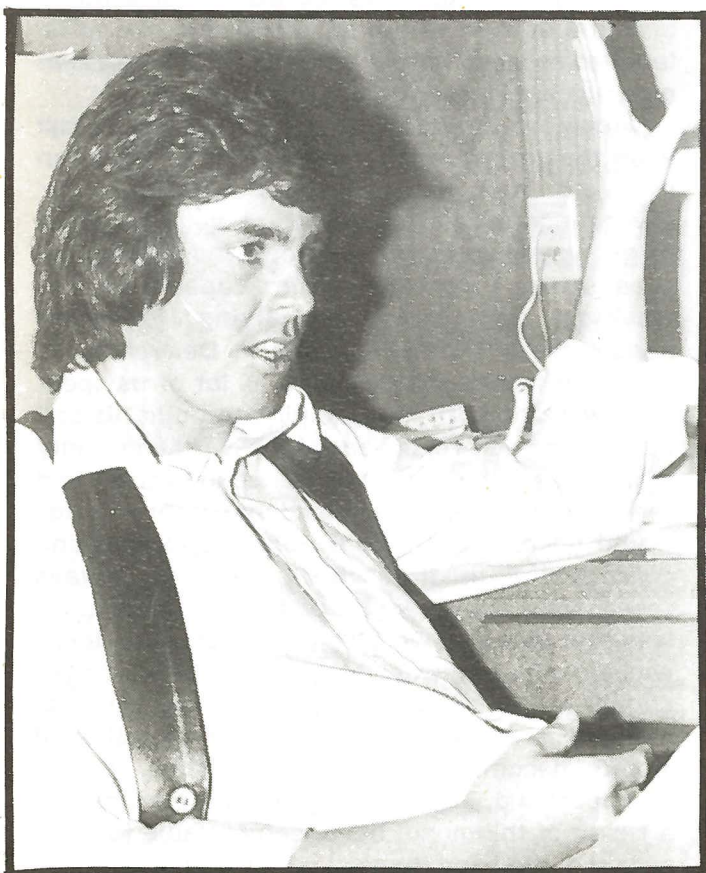
"Finally the parents pretty much rejected their child and asked us to provide residential care for him. The program that I worked in had two group homes for young men, so we arranged a temporary living situation for him for thirty days. This provided some time out for the parents and hopefully, some good support for the young man. After the thirty days were up the parents did a lot of politicking with our organization to try and keep their son in the group home. During the thirty days they never visited him. When he tried to call them on the phone they would tell him he had to stay at the home and that he was on his own now. This proved to be extremely difficult for him, he was only eighteen and had been rejected from his family. He is still in the group home and has not had the opportunity to work out the feelings of rejection he received from his family. He doesn't understand what his family expects from him or what he should expect from them. This may not be a typical case, but it is an example of what can happen to a child, retarded or gifted, when they don't get the proper support from their family. It's real sad to see these kinds of things happen."



"...to assure that each student is given a chance to be able to work with kids."

In relating to Judy's recommendations of other people who could tell me about different aspects of the program, I met with Ian Payton, the instructor of special education at CNCC. "I mainly teach psychology classes and supervise practicum students. The main objective of this program is to give the students strong theoretical and psychological backgrounds in the classroom. I'm also into one to one situations with the students. A lot of the students who come here don't have what are considered really strong skills, so we take them from where they are and develop them more. We get into a lot of individual situations that way. In a four year college, you get into a large scale thing, but here into more individualized and one to one. We can do that now because we are very small, but in the next few years we'll be growing. Between my work here and at the Discovery Center, I work with both children and adults. That way I don't lose touch with children, and I know where they're coming from.

"I hold a master's degree and I'm finishing my doctorate at the University of Northern Colorado. I've also attended the University of Rochester. I picked the area of Special Education to major in because I felt there was a real need in psychotherapy and counseling. There were situations to deal with, children who had problems, increasingly so because society is becoming so complex and as time goes on we'll have more and more problems with children. The increasing number of women going to work, the increasing number of divorces, that all come back to kids and we have to begin dealing with it.



Ian Payton - Instructor of Special Education

"The most difficult part of my schooling was getting the practical experience, working with people rather than theoretical situations. The thing that is unique about our program is that a lot of students get practical experience. When I was at the University of Rochester, they were into research. Today more and more universities are getting more practical; they will put you into a working situation before they get you into theory.

"I ran a center in Denver where I had four Blacks working for me. The whole center was Black, I was the only white person there. I had a lot of problems in the beginning because I had to overcome the color barrier. They used to call me Honky and Paddy. It was really difficult at times to stand aside from that, and they'd always try to put the people who worked for me against me because they were Black. They talked brotherhood and that Blacks should stick together and not listen to their Honky teacher. It took about three or four months before they understood I'm not as white as he seemed to be.

"I did a lot of recreational type things, football, basketball, in fact I had two guys work for me who were 6'5". The kids really got turned on by it; we took a lot of trips to the zoo and the park to give the kids the idea of freedom rather than the confined space in a classroom.

"I was sharing an experience with a class the other day about Celebrity Sports Center. They have so many rules there and about four or five lifeguards constantly blowing whistles. It was Friday, and we decided to do this as a treat because they'd been good all week. I told them beforehand that these kids are a little bit disturbed, trying to put it politely to the lifeguards. They said, 'Sure, no problem.' Well, we got there and every few seconds a whistle was blowing, the kids could do no right, finally they ended up destroying the whole place. They destroyed the locker room then went to the game room and began tearing it apart and beating up the attendant who takes the money. Even with forehand notice the lifeguards and attendants were badgering these kids when they shouldn't have been. So we managed to all get kicked out and under no certain terms were we ever to return."

With his experience in running such a center, I asked Ian if he had some memories about kids who came there. "I had one kid while I was working in Denver who proclaimed to be taken over by the Devil. He was a Black kid from the Five Points in Denver and he was in my center for about three months. He had ripped off about four Seven Eleven stores and held down two kids and carved letters in their chests and at this point 'The Exorcist' was coming out. He had it in his head that he wasn't in control of his behavior, and that the reason he was so bad was because

the Devil was in him. He had three months to take on the characteristics of the Devil, he could roll his eyes so that all you could see were the whites, he would be totally out of control for hours at a time and he could also make growling sounds like the person in 'The Exorcist.' Finally, we had a person from the Colorado Bureau of Psychology and Medicine come over and do a brain scan on him. He definitely had some kind of cerebral damage. We had to put him into the twenty-four hour facility."



"...everybody deserves special attention."

In an effort to broaden the training program for paraprofessionals at CNCC, a skills series on handicapped skiing was set up for all the two year level students. The purpose was to expose them to blind, deaf, three track, four track and other kinds of skiing. Here is how Ian explained the new skiing program, "We set up a program at Howelsen Hill that has about twelve students in it, training them for handicapped skiing. Not only do we train them in a recreational sense but in the underlying process of what is above the knee and below the knee handicapped and how to deal with some of these psychological overtures. It is on Wednesday nights from 6:00 until 9:00.

"There's not as much cooperation between the students and the community as I would choose to have because you are dealing with the handicapped population. There are so many federal laws and agencies with particular problems that must also be dealt with, it becomes difficult if you overlap services. If you overlap that means that the federal funds are taken away from the duplication. You really have to be careful in a

small town like Steamboat that you don't duplicate services. We are primarily a training institution in that we don't deal directly with the handicapped, all we are doing is training the students to teach. We originally set up the program so that the students would be dealing with the handicapped population, but we found out if we did that we'd be duplicating another service's efforts. A lot of our students already were working with this agency's programs in physical therapy and recreational therapy.

"The biggest problem that the kids have to overcome in the skiing program is the stigma of being handicapped and unable to do anything, the least of which would be skiing. They find out once they get on skis that they are just as normal as everybody else because they can move just as fast. In everyday life they are physically slower, but on skis that all changes and so once they can get past that stigma I think a lot can become of it.

"I would say that ninety percent of the students after being initiated, are turned onto it so much they want to keep coming back. The muscles that they are developing have become strengthened from their daily work. They easily become attuned to skiing right away. It is the same thing with their shoulders, when they're using outriggers their shoulder development is really big so they really adapt to using these kinds of things. They can learn quick because their muscles are really strong.

"I have another experience I'd like to tell you about, a fourteen year old blind girl at Winter Park. She had been blind since birth. I remember one day when everything was a deep blue and it had just snowed the night before, I was taking her to the top and I said, 'God, that sky is so blue today.' I didn't realize that the blind have no conception of what blue is. She had no idea what I was talking about."

To give me a look on how a student in this program perceived the many advantages it offered, I talked with Debbie Hazelbaker, a 1977 graduate of Steamboat High.

"I went to C.S.U. last year and they didn't offer any Special Ed classes, so by the time I found out it was too late to apply anywhere else. I was out of money so I came up here. I just started the program this year, the basic courses. I really like the teachers and the thing that is so nice is that we are working with kids while we learn. It's not just school, you can go down to Denver and go to conventions, there are all sorts of things to do like the Winter Olympics and going to Winter Park. It's not just learning, it's taking off and getting as much as you can. You have to do practicum and work at the Discovery Center so that you can find out if you will like this type of work or not.

"The practicums are experience in the 90 hours you have to work at the Discovery Center for the first semester. The second semester you have to work somewhere in the community or at the Discovery Center, it's up to you. There is the Quest program at the elementary school, some people are going to work there tutoring the children. There is also the Crisis Team and all sorts of other things that you can become involved in. I want to work at Social Services for my second practicum.

"My first experience with kids was at the Discovery Center where they have about fifteen kids mainly with family problems. It was a good experience, nothing exciting or disastrous. But this first experience did make me realize that I do want to work with children and go into Special Ed. My main interests are Special Education or Social Work, but I haven't decided on which of the two. There is also an area of the field that I am not looking forward to dealing with, emotionally disturbed, because I don't know how far my patience would go. It's hard for me to realize that they really don't know what they're doing. I feel that they should be able to sit down and get hold of themselves and do it right and not get angry and hit you. Emotionally disturbed would be really hard for me. I haven't had any experience with it yet, except what I've seen. I really hope I won't have to deal with it.

"One experience that didn't work out so well for me was with a kid who would fight when he got upset. I just happened to be the one around. I didn't know what to do. I understood, but I couldn't let him beat on me. Roger came in and helped catch him. It ended up all right but when



I'm sick; in sign language - Debbie Hazelbaker is a student training in the program.

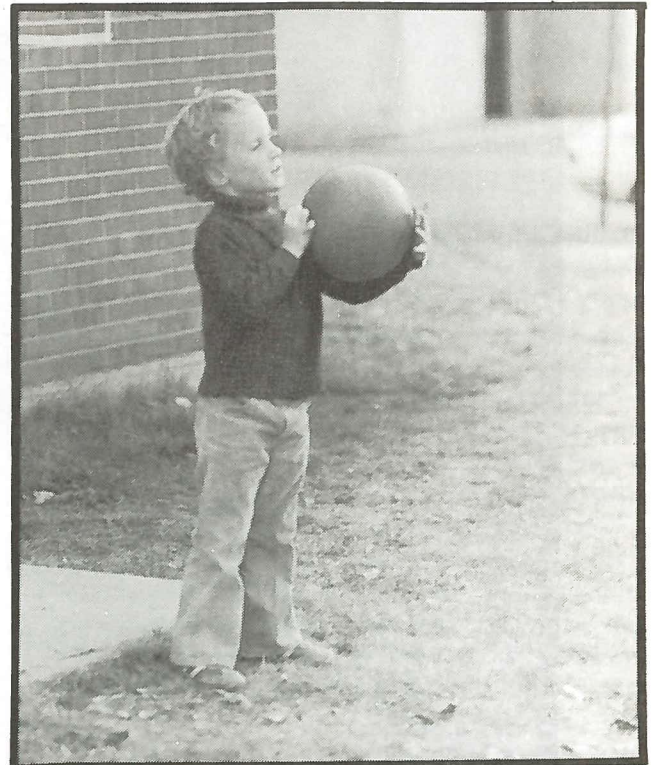
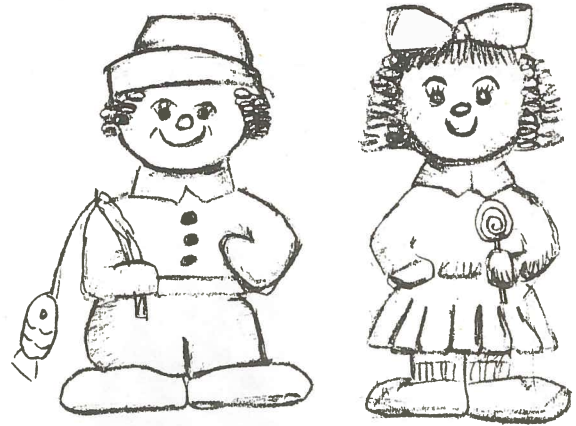


“...you learn from them.”

it first started, I didn't know what to do. The only adults I have had to deal with were just parents of kids at the Discovery Center. This is not as much as I would like to. A lot of them didn't want to do much with us, just with the kids.

“I thought the sign language would be hard but Susan just started us right in and it has been easy and fun. I don't know what is the hardest. It's been an easy program for me, at times too easy. I find my schedule of classes and the work exciting. I like to be busy. We are really individualized in this program. If you have a problem they pull you out and work with you. They don't just tell you to do it, they help you do it, and it's not so hard.”

Through these interviews, I have personally found the area of being a Paraprofessional a challenge. To be able to work with either a handicapped or gifted child or an adult would be one of the best, most valuable, learning experiences I could find. After speaking with Judy, Roger, Ian, Susan and Debbie, I became more interested in the program than I ever imagined. I realized that this area would be beneficial for me to study, after graduating from high school this spring. The rewards of working with the handicapped would be seeing the growth in the children with whom I will work.



“You can work with them, but you can't control the child's mind.”

