

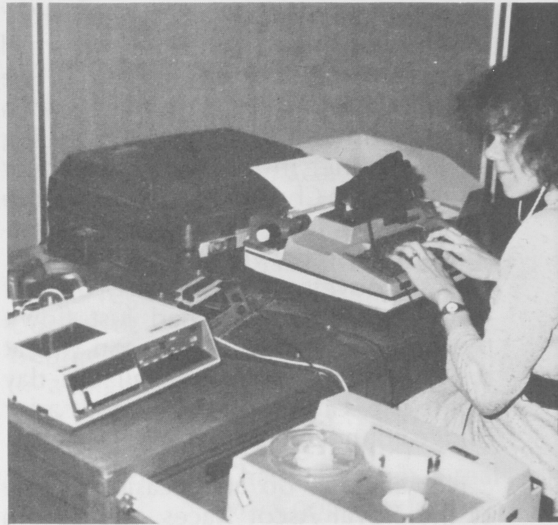
Disabled, Not Unable

by Linda Dabros

Do you feel awkward in the presence of a blind person? A person in a wheelchair? In fact, when meeting handicapped people, do you unconsciously say to yourself "Hey, stay away from me, you make me feel uncomfortable because you're different"? If your answer to any of these questions is yes, you shouldn't feel terribly guilty. It is normal for us to feel uncomfortable in situations when we are unsure what to do. But that's not to say we don't want to change.

For most of us, it is very difficult to imagine what it would be like to go through life with a physical handicap. For those with a permanent physical limitation, learning to cope in an "unhandicapped" society is a fact of life. With 1981 being International Year of Disabled Persons, it seems most appropriate to highlight some of the achievements which have been made in the Force with respect to improving opportunities for the handicapped. Our handicapped employees have certainly proven, in various occupations and in many different work environments, that to be disabled does not mean to be incapable.

Last year, Diana Sunquist, the Public Service Personnel Administrator at "F" Division, suffered a severe fall which left her partially paralyzed in one arm. While receiving treatment at a rehabilitation hospital in Regina, she realized that the handicapped represent a valuable untapped human resource. Through discussions with the vocational training and placement staff at the hospital, Diana discovered they were willing to provide training to disabled persons to meet employer needs.



Darlene Jones of the Commercial Crime Section, "E" Division — District 1, using the Optacon and the typewriter lens module.

Richard Lizée, who was fitted with an artificial right hand and arm following a farming accident, received training on the hospital's modern equipment and was subsequently found to be the most qualified candidate for a micrographic operator position in Records Management.

Many rehabilitation associations have a program whereby they will pay handicapped persons' wages while they gain practical work experience with an outside employer. These work assessment projects have proven to be beneficial both to handicapped workers and managers. While the disabled individual is given the opportunity to regain confidence and skills, the manager is given the chance to assess the person's abilities. The end result, in many cases, is permanent employment for the handicapped.