

## Young people with brain damage benefit from home rehabilitation method

A Toronto group home is pioneering a program that is aimed at rehabilitating brain-damaged young people so that they can live independently.

Ashby House, a group home for brain-damaged young men and women was founded by Mira Ashby, a senior medical social worker with the Toronto General Hospital. The home is funded by the federal and Ontario governments. She believes the young men and women who go through the home's rehabilitative program will be able to function on their own some time in the future.

She has been working with brain-injured people for the past 16 years and became more and more frustrated when she saw many of the young patients being placed in chronic care or nursing homes where they were left to vegetate.

Their accidents left permanent impairment such as speech disorders or partial paralysis and memory impairment, said Ms. Ashby.

"The brain needs exercise to function normally," she explained. "However, in institutions, their brains deteriorated even more. And if they tried to make it in society, they were often considered retarded, ridiculed for their efforts or over-protected by their parents.

"The program we offer these young people, in a family environment, helps

them develop co-ordination skills through regular exercise and crafts," she said.

### Two phases

The group home is the first phase of Ashby House's rehabilitation program. In the second phase the residents move to a nearby apartment building where they share a one-bedroom unit. When they reach the second phase of rehabilitation, they are taught budgeting.

"All of our residents progress at their own speed, but they are expected to contribute whatever they can to the operation of Ashby House," said Shirley Day, the co-ordinator and house mother.

Routine housekeeping duties such as laundry and bedmaking are completed early in the morning so the residents can devote their time to woodworking, weaving, pottery and academic studies. These sessions enable the residents to expand their powers of concentration and develop co-ordination skills at their own pace.

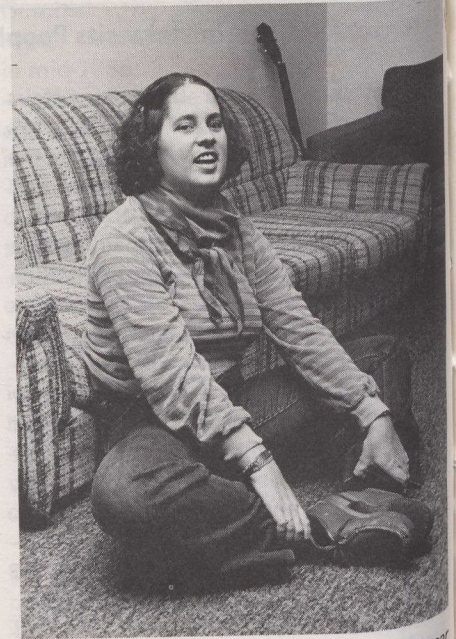
"Initially, some of the young people have attention spans of only five minutes," said Ashby. Our counsellors and therapists work with them to help increase their attention spans. Some have to learn to read and write all over again or to identify certain objects they have forgotten. They also learn the fundamentals of cooking (they are responsible for their own meals under supervision). Every program is geared towards using their minds for memory reconstruction.

### Instruction manual

When residents leave the group home they are given a manual of operations. This contains illustrated instructions of all of the components of day-to-day living, from cleaning the apartment to laundry care and meal preparation. The latter section contains a few recipes which they have already tested at Ashby House.

Inquiries about the rehabilitation methods used in the project have from such places as Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

"We encourage the residents to use their whole body — their arms and legs as well as their brains — in our therapy," she said. "Our treatment consists of helping them develop skills from on-the-job training, selected courses on the school curriculum and from volunteer work. They progress at their own speed and we try to



Judy, 24, who was injured in a car accident three-and-a-half years ago, brings the feminine touch to formerly all-male Ashby House.

help them keep their trust in themselves as human beings," said Ms. Ashby.

"Films are made periodically to record their progress," she continued. "Our audio-visual equipment monitors each stage of their development and the residents can watch playbacks to see the progress they are making. It gives them encouragement."

(From Housing Ontario, by Jean O'Bright, January/February 1981.)

## Housing information for disabled

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) will act as a clearing house for all information having to do with housing for disabled people, Paul Cosgrove, Minister responsible for CMHC has announced.

The Canadian Housing Information Centre, (CHIC) operated by CMHC, has hundreds of books, periodicals, research reports, and other material dealing with the special housing needs of the disabled and has access to all of the principal data banks related to housing.

Mr. Cosgrove said the extension of the CHIC's services was inaugurated as part of CMHC's contribution to the International Year of Disabled Persons but will be continued on a permanent basis.

CHIC receives about 9,000 requests for information a year from researchers, students, business people and others.



Barry Shainbaum photos

Two young men prepare dinner at their apartment located in the west central part of Toronto. It is just a couple of blocks away from Ashby House where they went through a rehabilitative program for young adults with brain damage.