

Parents of Retarded Child Are Hard Hit, Kiwanis Told

The "forgotten child" — the youngster who is retarded mentally — was described sympathetically to members of the Kiwanis Club yesterday. But the picture that emerged vividly from the talk, given by Miss Elizabeth M. Smith of the Willowbrook State School staff, was that of the troubled, even desperate parents of such a child.

Miss Smith, senior social worker at the school, said that children, such as several thousand under care at the institution, are "forgotten because people are scared to think about them. They are an un-

known quantity, a skeleton in the closet."

There are hundreds of thousands of such children, and many of them live normal or near-normal lives; contrary to belief in some quarters, they are very gentle persons, she said.

Parents Seek Miracles

The blow falls heaviest on the parents, who often go from doctor to doctor, clinic to clinic, "seeking a medical miracle," spending money they cannot afford to spend, she said.

Each family reacts differently, Miss Smith added, but fundamentally they had dreamed for their child the same dreams that other parents hold dear — dreams wrecked "in one little minute" by an expert's diagnosis.

She painted a word picture for the Kiwanians meeting in the Meurot Club, of last hopes of parents' helplessness, of families broken up, of emotional disturbances, physical breakdowns, financial stress.

"People with mentally retarded youngsters feel at a deadend," said Miss Smith. "They should be normally functioning, healthy, average people, holding jobs, keeping house. They can't possibly do this."

The affliction "strikes whenever, wherever, and no one knows how," she explained.

'Miserably Unhappy'

She told how parents come to Willowbrook State School with their children, "always miserably unhappy." The problem is most difficult, she went on, when there are other, normal children in the family.

"Our school represents a tremendously difficult task" she said. "You need a tremendous amount of courage to work in this field."

She praised highly the volunteer workers who help out at Willowbrook, on such matters as picnics, in supplying candy and cake and, as an example, in organizing a band. The children love music she added.

"We at the school have a fundamental philosophy," Miss Smith explained. "These children are human beings. They have certain rights and those rights cannot be transgressed. This (the school) is a world which they can understand and in which they are understood. We try to say to them: 'We are thinking, not in terms of what you are not, but in terms of what you can be.'"

"They just have a bit of limitation but you can love them in spite of that."

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