

Deaf man finally joins community

Joseph McNulty lives with six people, who range from severely to mildly mentally retarded, and several staff members in a community residence in Syracuse.

In the house, he helps with cooking and cleaning and learns "community survival skills" including shopping, making change and ordering meals in restaurants, said John Campfield, the administrator responsible for community houses in Onondaga County.

Recently, he began working at Community Hospital in Syracuse, where he operates a dishwasher in the kitchen. He also has become involved with a local family with whom he spends time and who will be learning sign language.

The staff at the group home is also learning sign language, and although the other residents do

not sign, McNulty has non-verbal ways of communicating with them, Campfield said.

"Joe's a very personable guy. He's very well liked by the other people. He tends to be a bit hesitant," slow to warm up to people, "but once he develops a relationship with others, he's very much a caring person" and demonstrates that with "non-verbal caring-kind of communication."

McNulty sometimes teaches sign language to others. "He's very patient. He'll teach you specific signs or develop some unique sign of his own. He's very patient if you don't understand his meaning," Campfield said.

As for taking care of himself, "Joe is impeccable. He's neat as a pin." To help him, "the staff has put considerable effort into his appearance and provides him

with nice-looking clothing appropriate for his age.

"I think Joe has a lot of assets that could be capitalized on. I can see him down the road living" more independently either in a supervised apartment — one that is staffed 24 hours a day — or in a supportive apartment — where a staff member occasionally drops by, Campfield said.

A reporter from the Advance met Joseph McNulty two weeks ago during a meeting between McNulty's guardian, Dan Geller, several experts on child development and deafness and McNulty's lawyers.

McNulty is 5 feet 10 inches and weighs 160 pounds. He is a handsome young man with a small, sculpted nose, high cheekbones, dark brown eyes and full eye-

brows. He is fastidious in his appearance.

Although his hearing aid amplifies some sounds, McNulty didn't — couldn't — pay attention to the lawyers' and doctors' comments about his future.

Instead, he concentrated on pouring ketchup from a foil package over his french fries and eating a hamburger. After McNulty squirted two packages of ketchup on his food, Geller signed to him "enough" and Joe put down a third package.

Later, one of the experts, Jerome D. Schein of New York University, played "War," a card game, with Joe. When asked who won the last game, McNulty shrugged his shoulders and pointed at Schein.

— ANNE SILVERSTEIN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER