

For Helpers of Retarded, A Way to Move Up

Annabell Kendrick has been working with mentally retarded adults for more than 30 years, helping them write their name and brush their hair, leading them in games and attending to their most basic needs. But despite her experience and dedication, without a college degree she had no chance to advance in her career — to be a teacher or therapist rather than an assistant.

"I enjoy my job," said Ms. Kendrick, who works at the Staten Island Developmental Center. "It's very gratifying. But I want to do so much more."

Now a new developmental disabilities program at City University of New York is giving her that chance. The program offers job training for workers giving direct care to the retarded and helps prepare them to advance in the field. Proponents hope it will help reduce the high turnover among these workers, which is estimated to average 50 percent a year.

"It's a tragedy to lose ambitious workers because there is no mechanism to help them move up," said John F. Kennedy Jr., the Assistant District Attorney in Manhattan who is chairman of an advisory committee for the university project.

The project grew out of the interest in mental retardation on the part of the Kennedy family and James Murphy, chairman of the university's board of trustees, whose 30-year-old son, Michael, has Down's syndrome.

So far the university has added half a dozen courses on developmental disabilities at the College of Staten Island, where Ms. Kendrick is enrolled, and at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn. Other courses are being offered at Queen's College and at Kingsborough Community College.

Dr. William Ebenstein, coordinator of the developmental disabilities studies program, said that existing courses at Hunter College and LaGuardia Community College are being expanded, and that the university plans to add and revise courses at several other schools in the system.

The City University project is financed by grants from the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation, the Aaron Diamond Foundation, the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council and the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. Some of the money is going directly to 25 outstanding students, like Ms. Kendrick, who receive \$500 each semester for tuition and expenses.