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**A**

**HISTORY OF**

**CHILDREN'S AID**

**SOCIETY OF**

**JEWISH WOMEN**

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A HISTORY OF  
THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF JEWISH WOMEN

One of our earliest projects, when we were known as "JEWISH CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY", was dental care for dependent children placed in foster homes through the Jewish Family and Children's Service. In conjunction with the agency, there was a panel of eighteen dentists located in different sections of Pittsburgh, all of whom gave their services gratis. CHILDREN'S AID was charged only a nominal fee for materials used. The manner in which the children were handled was most important. An appointment was made by the Jewish Family and Children's Service for the child with the dentist located nearest his home. He was received by the dentist as a private patient and no one was aware that his case was being handled by an organization. There was no waiting around for hours as is done in clinics - and when the work was completed, the cost involved was paid for by CHILDREN'S AID.

This particular piece of work was started in 1937 and was quite active during and shortly after World War II. However, the past several years has found many families financially independent and the need for this aid decreased. Nevertheless, this service is still available and we will continue to give such aid whenever a case is referred to us.

As the dental work decreased we found the need for our services in another field -- aid to Cerebral Palsy children. CHILDREN'S AID sponsored a Cerebral Palsy Conference, the first and only one of its kind, in the Falk Clinic under the supervision of Dr. Jessie Wright. We gave this service for a number of years and honestly

feel that we were partly responsible for the National Foundation of Cerebral Palsy coming into Pittsburgh. Since they were able to give aid to these children on a much larger scale, we bowed gracefully and stepped out of that picture.

The year 1951 was indeed a year in which the loyalty of the members of CHILDREN'S AID was put to a test for we found ourselves without a specific project. The search for a new project in order that CHILDREN'S AID may continue its aid to children, regardless of race, creed or color, became the major activity within the Society. In order to keep the group together it was necessary to plan many interesting programs. It was at such a program that we met Dr. Jack Birch, Psychologist and Director of Special Education with the Board of Education. He spoke of the needs of the Mentally Retarded Child and deplored the fact that there was little or no help being given to them or for them. These youngsters were referred to as "the forgotten child". As Dr. Birch spoke on about the "forgotten child", the members became greatly interested and filled with the desire to help bring this child "out of the darkness, into the light". The needs of these children were many but the one most appealing to the members was a classroom which would give aid directly to the child. It was decided then to undertake as the organization's new project, a Pre-School Training Class for Mentally Handicapped Children - children who are not educable but who can be trained to do things for themselves and thus find a new world as socially acceptable members.

To accomplish this would be no easy task, but we refused to be discouraged. Once again CHILDREN'S AID became pioneers. First on the agenda was to appoint a

planning committee who with Dr. Birch as advisor, would plan this program thoroughly and then move step by step.

The first step was to secure applicants. In conjunction with this we worked with a newly-formed organization in the city, Parents and Friends of the Mentally Retarded. Their purpose in organizing was to create awareness to the public about mental retardation. Through them we received names of children eligible for this class.

Second - admittance. To assure the success of this program, certain qualifications would be necessary. The class would be for children between the ages of five to nine; they must be toilet trained; and must have an I, Q. of no lower than 35 and no higher than 49. It would then become necessary for the child to have a psychological examination. For this we secured the services of Dr. Mary E. Cole and her assistant Miss. Zita Okinac. Upon receipt of the application, Dr. Cole would make an appointment to examine the child in his home. Upon completion of the examination, it was on Dr. Coles recommendation and only hers, that the child would be admitted into the class.

It was also decided, on professional advice, that the class would be limited to ten children at the beginning and that sessions would be held four afternoons a week.

Third - Teacher. It was recommended that a teacher qualified to teach "exceptional" children be employed. As this was a new field to most educators, this was not an easy task. It was then suggested that perhaps the teacher might be willing to further her studies at night school while this class was in the experimental stage and thus become qualified. This was agreeable to the teacher.

chosen for our class.

Fourth - After the above steps were taken and held in readiness, the very important and final step was - where to hold the class. For this we went to the Board of Education and Miss. Marie Saul, Associate Supt. in charge of Elementary Education. Although Miss. Saul was interested in the need of such a service to the community, she strongly believed it would fail. However, after many conferences with Miss. Saul and Dr. Birch, our plans were presented to Dr. Dimmick and the Board of Directors of the Pittsburgh Board of Education, for a thorough study. They approved, but the question of finding a school which would be most receptive to this kind of class was not easy. P.T.A.'s are well organized and parents of normal children did not encourage this kind of a class in their school. However, we met with Mrs. Mary Marshall, then principal of Larimer School, who had been interested in retarded children and had tried to help them for some time. She offered a classroom in her school and whatever help she could give to CHILDREN'S AID.

With every step planned carefully and thoroughly; and with such loyalty, understanding, and willingness on the part of CHILDREN'S AID members, how could this program fail? Needless to say - it didn't.

And so on September 14, 1953 after two years of interviews, meetings, disappointments, and many obstacles, CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY inaugurated their new project, the Pre-School Training Class for Mentally Handicapped Children in the Larimer School, East Liberty. This was the first class of its kind in Allegheny County; and the second of its kind in Pennsylvania. With the aid of volunteers from CHILDREN'S AID to assist the teacher, the class has been operating every day of the public school

calendar, on a five day a week basis, governed by the rules of the Board of Education.

We are proud of the gratifying results achieved from this project. Through the pioneering of CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF JEWISH WOMEN to aid the Retarded Child, the public has become familiar with and conscious of this great need. Members of other communities have visited our class and realizing that something can be done with these children, have organized similar groups in their communities. We have had visitors and educators from many parts of the United States and foreign countries observe our class and note it's progress and success.

Through our efforts the Board of Education was motivated to open two pilot centers in September of 1955 for school age retarded children.

It is even more rewarding to CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY to have been pioneers in this area too, and to prove that retarded children can be helped.

Compiled in 1963  
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**YOU  
CAN HELP  
CHILDREN'S AID  
FOR  
CHILDREN'S SAKE**

*Lost Children*

A crippled child can tug at your heart

And capture your sympathy

But the mentally sick just break your heart

With afflictions the eye can't see.

Unloved and lost in their nightmare dreams,

Bewildered, they search in vain

For someone to take them by the hand

And guide them to health again.

If you are blessed with a normal child

Give your heart to this wonderful cause

And share the blessing of helping home

A lost child . . . who might have been yours.

—NICK KENNY

*(By courtesy of anonymous contributor)*