

# ... Independently but Responsibly

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he was not a typical teenager. His eyes reflected pain — physical and emotional.

Since his father was dead and his mother had emotional problems, Larry had lived with his aunt and uncle in Rochester. But his family background caused emotional problems which exploded into disciplinary problems. He was sent to a Syracuse foster care facility when he was 13. There, he received counseling, made friends and fell in love.

After three years, Larry was returned to his aunt's home and again was unhappy. But this time, he prescribed his own therapy.

Since happiness was his Syracuse girlfriend, he pedaled his bike in that direction. It was a dark autumn night so the tractor-trailer that hit him probably never saw him because it didn't stop. And neither did anyone else. After crawling to a house for help, he was rushed to a Rochester hospital.

Since his leg veins were severed, the specialists tried vein transplants. It was unsuccessful. When gangrene set in, the leg was amputated.

Larry's recuperation was a long one and swung from the valleys to the mountain tops. Depression, anxiety and infection dotted a brief stay at his aunt's home before he was rehospitalized. At that time, plans were also laid for his subsequent move to the Villa.



Leisure time with a friend.

Like many amputees, Larry refused to recognize any limitations or changes in his life style. He fantasized himself as a future pro athlete scoring the winning touchdown or sliding in for the tie-breaking run. But his mood pendulum could also swing to the depths when he despaired over his future.



A brief February warm spell brings out the 'boy' in Group Home residents.

According to his social worker, Paul Pickering, "Our first goal with Larry was to level him off. We had to help him establish a realistic approach to living, recognize the areas where he couldn't function but at the same time help him create goals where he could compete."

Since his high school education had been spotty, he received home tutoring from the city school district which was probably the turning point in his rehabilitation. Recognizing his potential, approval was asked and received for acceptance to a BOCES program.

As a result of the tutoring, counseling and physical therapy by Villa nurse, Margaret Elliot (whom he views as a second mother), Larry returned to high school. A few months later, he was ready for a Group Home.

Since most boys leave a Home when they are 18, Larry is a senior citizen at his house. Because of his age and ability to handle responsibility, he is on a maturity program. This basically allows him as much responsibility and independence as he is able to handle. For example, although his house father must know where he is and what time he expects to be home, Larry sets his own curfew.

Today, Larry's biggest problem is slowing down. Besides classes, homework and his house duties, he also works part time at the War Memorial. Both his house parents and social worker agree that Larry is an over-achiever. Although our counseling has supported him, a lot of his success is due to his own self-motivation.

While it is true that all children are not blessed with Larry's self-motivation, it is the Group Home's function to prepare them for independence.

Bill McLaren, director of St. Joseph's Villa Group Homes, summed it up:

"Through the combined counseling of our house parents and social workers, we try and help our younger children with certain types of

behavior, and our teenagers find themselves during the self-identity syndrome.

As a result of individual treatment, when a child is ready, we get him on a maturity program. Living with less structure, less rules, the responsibility rests on his shoulders but with our support as a backstop.

"Our goal with each child is always the same. When he leaves our Group Home, he will be able to cope with living problems independently."

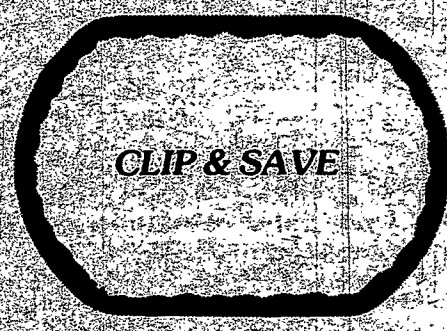


Jennifer Graham, 2 1/2, is helped to a look-see.

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