

Text and Photos
By Susan McKinney



Terry Flagg, a frequent volunteer at the villa, watches as one of the boys takes aim at the basket.



Applying a glaze during ceramics class.



Father Donald Schwab, part-time chaplain at the villa, shares a laugh during a visit with two youngsters.

Almost Home

The 76 adolescent and teenage residents of St. Joseph's Villa and its five affiliated group homes all have one thing in common: the sense of family and community which binds them all together.

A cottage type institution caring for children with difficulty in social relationships, the Villa was established in 1942 and occupies 40 acres on Dewey Avenue in Greece.

Voluntary and court placements are the source of the villa's population. A school on the grounds is used by those not yet ready to attend schools in the outside community. Among those providing the Villa's services are teachers, child care workers, social workers, community volunteers and administrators, all working to fill the individual child's special needs. Children are accepted according to the individual's need for group care and his ability to profit from the treatment program.

Recent years have seen the villa open five groups homes. Sister Ann Vincent, administrator, explains this step noting that in the past adolescents who had reached the age where they were discharged from the villa were not always ready to return to their own home or foster homes. Now that group homes have been established, sister points out, children who have finished treatment on the grounds can advance toward more independent living in the group home as a step towards returning to the community. Sister views the progress from villa to group home as a logical step. Most children, she stressed, can't tolerate the group home first; they need treatment on the grounds.

Population trends, sister indicated, predict older children will be the chief clients of the services community. She sees the lack of a gymnasium and vocational training program as a drawback for the villa. Although noting the full cooperation of the Greece Cooperative Education system, she adds that sometimes they just don't have the programs needed. "The children we can't serve in our school attend community schools. Some of the children need special placement. The public schools don't have specialized programs for older adolescents."

In addition to working to meet the present and projected needs of its residents, the administration now finds itself confronted with state cutbacks in aid. Sister explained that the villa is funded by the county from which the child comes. The county has a legal obligation to support the child and the state social services department in turn reimburses the county. Federal funds also come into the financial picture. The operational costs are met by state and county funds. The state freeze on funds going to child care agencies has kept the villa operating on the '74 aide rate since '75. Sister Ann points out that some agencies have closed in New York State and that the villa is seeking alternate sources of funding.

Prior to attending a meeting in Albany to discuss the state budget cuts, sister explained a special problem the villa and other agencies have faced. In the past agencies have been so busy treating children that they haven't looked to future and alternate ways of getting funds and are dependent on public money. This has changed, she went on to explain in that the villa is now looking into alternate sources of funding.



Catching up on some reading.