

Holy Childhood marks 40th year of pride, accomplishment

By Karen M. Franz
 Visitors to the School of the Holy Childhood are, neither infrequent nor especially well-known. Novelty, therefore, seems an unlikely factor, yet the school's students and clients greet the stranger as if he or she were some sort of celebrity. Faces break into broad smiles, and handshakes accompany ready introductions. Occasionally, a surprise kiss is proffered.

The students and clients seem genuinely interested in guests to the school, but the gracious welcome they extend may originate with a deeper emotion — pride in themselves and in their abilities. They're eager to meet new people and to show off what they're doing.

And they're doing quite a bit — from academic studies to weaving, from woodworking to ceramics, from gym classes to baking pies and making soup. Each of them has much to be proud of.

Creating that sense of pride is perhaps Holy Childhood's greatest accomplishment. For 40 years, the school has been turning failure into success, discouragement into self-esteem.

Established in 1946 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, Holy Childhood has grown from a student body of 30 children in a portion of the former Immaculate Conception School to a non-sectarian agency serving more than 170 children and adults in its large Groton Parkway facility. Through the years, it has helped hundreds of mentally handicapped people to believe in themselves and to acquire the life skills they need to live with some measure of independence.

"Our ultimate goal is that they can live very fulfilled lives and develop as well as they can," says Gail Beimiller, the school's director of development.

Toward that end, Holy Childhood's staff has created "a unique, warm and loving atmosphere that brings out the best in everyone," Beimiller explains.

"The presence of the Sisters of St. Joseph and their involvement are very much a factor in terms of the environment and atmosphere here," she adds.



Speech therapist Marie Blood encourages DeVaughn Winert, 8, in his attempt to master the "S" sound of various winter terms.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Under the guidance of Sister Seraphine Herbst, executive director, and a lay board of directors, the school operates three distinct programs. The children's programs provide individualized academic curricula, prevocational training and adaptive physical education; as well as life-skills and crafts classes.

For example, children learn their way around a kitchen through weekly grocery

shopping and by preparing lunches for purchases by the school's staff. Other non-academic classes focus on work habits, sewing, ceramics and weaving.

The adult day-training programs offer three work environments to mentally handicapped people over the age of 21. Clients in these programs prepare apple pies and hors d'oeuvres for sale through the Food Service Program, create "Creative Crates" and

other projects in the woodshop, and perform piecemeal sub-contract operations for local industries in the Work Activities Center (VOCED Enterprises).

These sheltered workshops provide not only an employment program — plus a small income — to the school's adult clients, "but also nurturing, training and habilitation," Beimiller emphasizes.

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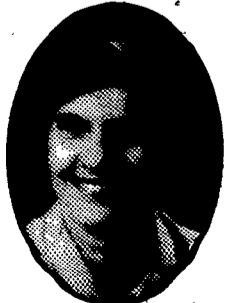

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