

# McGuire expands to fill needs

Home for disabled reaches out to preschoolers, autistic

By **PATRICIA BARTOS**  
Senior Staff Writer

Outreach is a key concept at McGuire Memorial Home in New Brighton.

Thus, when area parents asked for help for their young children with mental retardation and multiple disabilities, McGuire responded.

Last fall, it added a preschool to its private school program, welcoming eight children, ages 3 to 5 in that first class.

"For us, to be able to identify their needs, to set a clear plan for them at that age and to see it through is a wonderful opportunity," said Kim Lieb, director of day services at McGuire.

Sister Thaddeus Markelewicz, executive director, is pleased with the new addition.

The preschool program "takes us back to our roots, serving children from birth through age 7," she said.

More than 40 years ago, Felician sisters founded McGuire to care for such medically fragile children with profound mental and physical disabilities. As medical knowledge advanced, enabling the children to live longer, McGuire adapted its home to care for adults. Today, it has 89 residents.

Over the years, McGuire has continued to meet new needs. It now operates 12 small group homes for some 40 residents in nearby communities and has an Employment Option Center on campus, where young adults with mild to moderate disabilities receive training and find jobs. Through these, plus its day school programs, it serves more than 400 people throughout the area.

The home will host special events during March to celebrate National Mental Retardation Month.

For the new preschoolers, experts in many disciplines join to help plan the children's days.

"We have a strong team approach at McGuire," Lieb said.

The children receive physical and occupational therapy, training in feeding and toiletry. "We even have a reading program for them," she said.

McGuire also saw another opportunity for outreach.

Autism today is a fast-growing diagnosis, and "we saw the need," Lieb said.

Last fall, it added a program for autistic children. It has two elements, one for students ages 6 to 9 (with four children enrolled) and another for students ages 18 to 21 (with two young women enrolled).

"We've always worked with children who were medically fragile," Lieb said. "We expanded to include emotionally and behaviorally fragile children with autism."

Autistic children perceive and process information differently, she said. They are stressed by noise, people and transitions, which result in "all sorts of behavioral issues."

For the younger children, the morning is taken up with experts in language arts, gross motor skills, occupational therapy and speech therapy meeting needs of the individual child. In the afternoon they return to the classroom.

"We're giving them very specific instruction, with lots of

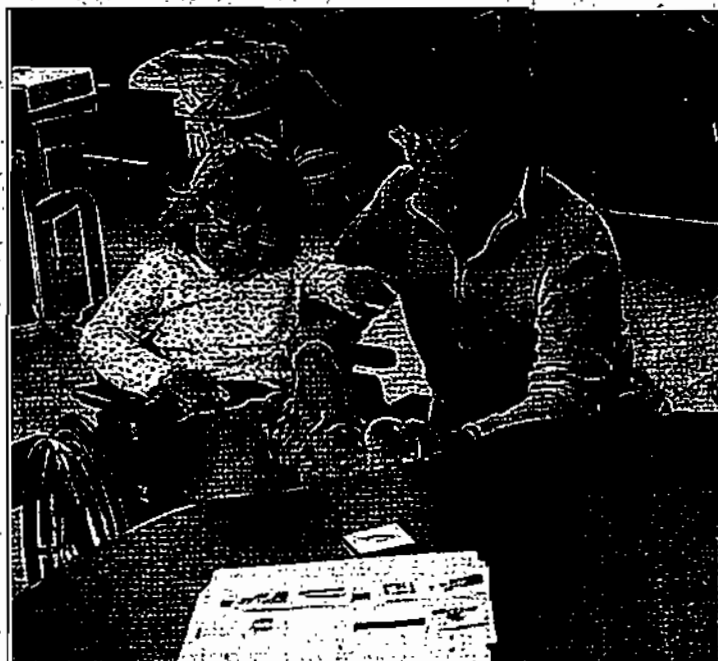


Photo by Doug Kaup

Sue Schutte, a physical therapist at McGuire Memorial Home in New Brighton, works with Lilly, a student in the home's new preschool program.

movement breaks," Lieb said. "A lot of kids have trouble with sensory bombardment. We give them a very specific and organized schedule. We really try to look at who they are and help them to process things."

The program for the young adults focuses on functional academics, community-based instruction, with emphasis on social skills and language, and school-to-work transition. They also receive occupational, physical and speech therapy and spend two days each week in McGuire's Employment Option Center.

"We want them to see that when they graduate this is what you do," Lieb said. "We've been able to match their skills and preferences. We want them to be able to follow directions on a job, to be able to figure things out."

Lieb likes parents to tour the employment center and to see that "this is what we're preparing them for."

McGuire has experts on staff in many specialized fields.

"We respect the expertise that each one has — and we take it," she said. "We're consistent. We're all doing the same thing, we're all able to support the kids."

For the older students, "it's all about allowing people to set goals for themselves, to make choices," she said. "We serve a wide range of kids with significant disabilities. Our expertise is meeting the individual needs of each child."

For information on placements at McGuire, or to arrange a tour, call Kim Lieb at 724-843-3400, ext. 106.

McGuire will host its annual Special Auction for Special People on Saturday, March 4, at 6 p.m. at the Omni William Penn Hotel in Downtown Pittsburgh. The evening will include a roast of Dave Wannstedt, head football coach at the University of Pittsburgh. Call 724-843-0365 for ticket information.