

A FRIEND OF THE DISABLED

ESTHER JOHNSON LANGWORTHY
WRITES ABOUT THEM

Faculty and students of Beirut University College in the forties and fifties, when it was successively called «American Junior College» and «Beirut College for Women», will surely remember a lively teacher who, besides her multiple talents and varied intellectual interests, had an unusual ability to befriend everyone. A gifted pianist, a teacher of humanities, Esther Johnson was also a dynamic social worker, a believer in a humane socialism which she tried to put into practice and did not restrict to mere talk.

One of the projects she undertook after leaving Beirut College and settling in Schenectady, N.Y. with her husband, Professor Harry Langworthy Jr., was to teach handicapped students who suffered from emotional and perceptual problems. After eleven years of sustained effort in this field, she has been working on a «Diary of a Teacher of Exceptional Students», describing the «educational experiences of twelve talented teenage students as they progress from frustration and failure to creative lives of usefulness to themselves and others.»

In her letter, which relates some of her own experiences, she points out unjustified attitudes adopted toward the disabled, by teachers, administrators and community leaders. Here are some examples:

1. Fear that the disabled are a threat to the safety and success of others.
2. Feeling that the disabled are not worthy of tax dollars being used for them, under the brutal pessimism of cost-effectiveness.
3. Prejudice against the abilities of the disabled based on the use of gross categorical labels: paranoiac, schizophrenic, retardate, etc.
4. Fear that the disabled would not be able to perform a responsible job, based on the use of outdated Stanford-Binet IQ Tests as an unchanging measure of ability and a sure prediction of future achievement, yet proved so wrong by the gifted individuals of history and thousands of very successful everyday people.

About help given the handicapped in the United States, she says that disabled Vietnam veterans have pressured Congress for equal access to universities, employment, travel on public vehicles and in public places. Many buildings now have wide doors and ramps for the use of the handicapped; education and employment are subsidized by government funds.

Of methods used for their rehabilitation, she mentions the writing of plays, movies, television shows, produced by and with the handicapped, demonstrating who they are and what they can do. The Emmy Award winning movie, «Elephant Man», is an example.

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Mrs. Langworthy gives credit to Mr. Nadeem Shweiri for his achievement in the Kafa'at Institute and to Dr. Munir Khoury for his research and analysis of the rehabilitation of the disabled in the Arab countries.⁽¹⁾ She adds that «Lebanon has not only practical concern but human and spiritual as well; a beautiful approach to the whole person, not isolating the disability as the important thing.»

Tribute should equally be paid to Mrs. Langworthy for her sincere interest in the handicapped. We hope that her happy initiative of writing a book which will allow other people to share her inspiring experience with them, will help to promote the cause she takes so much to heart.

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IYDP — Informational Data

According to reliable evaluations provided by UNO, 10 percent of the world's population are physically or mentally disabled.

Their total number is evaluated at 450 million.

Three-quarters of them receive no specialized help from experts. 146 million of the disabled are children below 15 years of age, distributed as follows:

- 6 million in North America
- 11 million in Europe
- 13 million in Latin America
- 18 million in Africa
- 88 million in Asia

Eighty percent of the total number are in developing countries where less than 1 percent of them receive specialized aid.

By the end of the 20th century, the number of disabled persons will reach 600 million, including 200 million children.

The portion of disability in the Developing World will rise with the increase of malnutrition and disease in pregnancy and early childhood. It will fall with the rise of the mortality rate among disabled children.

Modern medicine has contributed to the increase in the number of disabled persons, first, by lengthening the life of disabled children until adulthood; second, by allowing a large number of adults to reach old age, or the stage of utter disability.

CHIEF CAUSES OF DISABILITY

1. Malnutrition, especially among children.
2. Contagious and non-contagious diseases, which attack 3 percent of the world's population.
3. Mental retardation, affecting 1 to 4 percent of the adult world population.
4. Psychic disorders, affecting 40 million of the world's population.
5. Moral decadence, with about 100 million victims
6. Drugs and alcohol: 40 million addicts
7. Accidents due to varied causes
8. Deafness: 70 million victims
9. Blindness: 42 million victims
10. Brain paralysis: 15 million victims
11. Leprosy: 15 million victims
12. Epilepsy: 15 million victims.