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ABSTRACT

Written by disabled persons and intended for teenagers with physical disabilities, the booklet focuses on ways to become more independent. Family relationship are examined and suggestions are made for overcoming feelings of dependence and dealing with parents' overprotectiveness. The disabled teenager's social life, including dating and developing friends, is considered. Suggestions for coping in a regular school are made, and the importance of joining in regular activities is emphasized. Career choice, college decisions, vocatonal rehabilitation services, and job interviews are among topics covered in a final chapter. (CL)

Taking Charge of Your Life

A Guide to Independence for Teens with Physical Disabilities

Prepared by:
Center for Independent Living, Inc.
and Closer Look

Dedication

Disabled people at the Center for Independent Living believe that today's young disabled individuals will play an important role in the future of the movement to secure equal rights for all disabled people. This booklet is therefore dedicated to all disabled teenagers in this country. We admire the efforts of young people who are attempting to achieve fuller participation in the mainstream of community life.

Taking Charge of Your Life

A Guide to Independence for Teens with Physical Disabilities

Parents' Campaign for Handicapped Children and Youth
Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013

A few words about the organizations that prepared this booklet . . . .

Center for Independent Living

The Center for Independent Living, Inc., in Berkeley, California, is an exciting place. Adults who are disabled have created it and have made it thrive. The Center has become a symbol of what people with disabilities *can* do, and how they can work for their own independence. Most people simply refer to it as CIL, and thousands of disabled men and women know it as a place to turn for services that make independence possible: counseling, housing referral, attendant referral, transportation, wheelchair repair—all offered by people who know these needs from personal experience.

The CIL staff believes strongly that disabled people should be in charge of their own lives, and that they should take a leadership role in organizations created to serve their needs. Disabled persons know better than anyone else what effect a disability has on the freedom to pursue an ordinary life. They can be the best guides to resources that really help, to problem-solving and to ideas for living fully. CIL was one of the first organizations to show the way to independence for disabled people—the kind of living this booklet is about.

Closer Look

Closer Look, a project of the Parents' Campaign for Handicapped Children and Youth, is a national resource center for disabled people. The Center responds to requests for help from parents of handicapped children and youth, from professionals, advocates and disabled people throughout the country. It provides vitally needed information about educational opportunities and other resources that make it possible for disabled people to lead independent and productive lives.

Closer Look offers information that can make a difference—practical suggestions for fostering the potential of children and youth with mental, physical and emotional disabilities. The Center believes that disabled individuals have the right to participate fully in all of life, and devotes its energies to translating this goal into a reality.

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Note: The examples and personal sketches in this booklet are based on the real experiences of disabled individuals. In some cases, the narrative summarizes the experiences of several people. Fictitious names have been used to ensure privacy.

About the Authors

Dorothy DeSimone: Dorothy's disability is rheumatoid arthritis. She grew up in New York City, and attended regular classes throughout elementary and high school. She has a BA degree in Political Science and a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. Dorothy has worked as a rehabilitation counselor and as a paralegal advocate in a program dealing with problems of discrimination on the basis of disability. She has also been employed in a public library and a market research firm. Dorothy is currently assisting the job development staff at CIL.

Gary Norris Gray: Gary grew up in New Jersey and attended a special elementary school and a regular high school. His disability is cerebral palsy. Gary has a BA degree in History and is currently an attendant placement counselor at CIL.

Judy Heumann: Judy is deputy director of community affairs for CIL. She has been disabled since she contracted polio as a young child. She grew up in New York City and was a student in a special class in a regular public elementary school and attended a regular public high school with a special homeroom class. Judy has a BA degree in Speech and a master's degree in Public Health Administration and Planning. She has been employed as an elementary school teacher and as a legislative staff assistant in the U.S. Senate. She currently serves on the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped and the National Council on the Handicapped.

Stephen Hofmann: Steve's disability is cerebral palsy. He grew up in New York City and attended special classes in a regular public elementary school and was a student in a regular public high school with a special homeroom class. He has a BS degree in Elementary Education and a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling. Steve has worked as a counselor for disabled college students and as director of an independent living program. He is the chief trainer for the CIL KIDS project, a program explaining handicapping conditions to children and regular classroom teachers in elementary schools.

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We would like to thank the following people for their contribution in the development and preparation of this booklet:

Disabled Teenagers—Mary Buyard, Michael Joiner, Marlon Malone, Charles Meyers, Alan Richardson, Ernestine Rodgers, Carla Toth, Todd Wacker and Debbie Zeno.

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Sign Language Interpreter—Jay Jackson.

Consultants—Patricia McGoldrick and Anne Sadler.

The authors wish to express their appreciation to the staff of Closer Look for their contribution of ideas and experiences to this work. A special thanks to Annette Patella who edited the manuscript and supervised production of this booklet.

Introduction

This booklet is for and about teenagers who have physical disabilities. Those of us who planned and wrote it were disabled teenagers ourselves. Now as adults, we are leading independent, productive lives.

As disabled adults looking back on our own childhood and adolescence, we became aware of the need for a written account, one that would share our feelings and talk about what it is like to grow up with a disability and become a self-sufficient adult. We realized that we had lived through many similar personal experiences during our growing up years. We also realized that we could have benefitted from the insights and information that we hope this booklet will provide.

In many ways, the experiences of disabled teens are very much like those of teens who are not disabled, but there are important differences that create special difficulties and challenges. Most teenagers, for example, are eager to become independent, to have the freedom to shape their own lives. Disabled teenagers feel the same way, but they are faced with an additional obstacle: they are usually more dependent on parents and other family members.

Teenagers usually have a strong need to be like other young people of the same age, to do the same things, to be "in." Disabled teens feel that need keenly—but have a far more difficult time attempting to fulfill it. This booklet deals with these and other experiences in ways that we hope you will find helpful.

In order to develop this booklet, we held a series of discussion groups and personal interviews with disabled teenagers and adults, parents of disabled children, and teachers in the field of special education. We hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share the thoughts and ideas of these many participants. Even more, we hope this booklet will encourage you to discover and develop, to the fullest extent possible, the unique individual that is within you.

Life With Family

Day-to-day life with family has ups and downs for all teenagers. Growing up isn't easy. Conflict and frustration are part of everybody's adolescence. This is a time when *all* teenagers are beginning to establish a separate identity; sometimes family members may try to hold on as you assert yourself.

In addition to the usual stress of adolescence, there are extra strains for disabled teens and their families. Although each of us is a unique individual with our own set of feelings and attitudes, there are many probelms disabled teenagers have in common.

Communication Opens the Door to Understanding

The difficulties in creating open and honest lines of communication between parents and teenagers seem to be universal. These difficulties often become more intense when you are disabled. Parents may have problems dealing with the realities of their child's disability. Despite the growth of parent organizations over the past twenty years, many parents of disabled children are still isolated from other parents who have had similar experiences and could give helpful advice and support. Even the most concerned parents may be unaware of your important feelings, or hesitant to talk with you about your wishes, plans or worries.

As a young child you may have asked your parents the reasons why you were not able to do certain things, or why you seemed to be different from other children. Like Mary, who has cerebral palsy, you may have received responses that were not satisfactory and that really didn't answer your questions. You probably still have questions.

Don't Keep Your Questions to Yourself

Disabled teenagers usually do wonder about the nature of their disabilities and the effects that these disabilities will have on their future lives. Will I always have to use a wheelchair? Can I *ever* get my driver's license? Will my hearing improve as I get older? If I get married and have children, will they be blind?

Don't keep these questions bottled up. Talk to your parents. Tell them about the things that concern you. Find out what is on their minds. In many cases, you may both be concerned about the very same things. Maybe you can begin by sharing this booklet with them and asking them to discuss it with you.

If your parents are unable to talk with you about the things that are important to you, perhaps you can discuss them with some other member of your family. You may find it easier to talk with a brother or sister, with a favorite aunt or uncle, or with your grandparents. If you honestly feel that there is no one in your family in whom you can confide, don't give up. Try to find someone you can trust.

Your friends—disabled and non-disabled—may have information you need and suggestions for dealing with your problems; just talking things out with them can make you feel better. You may know some disabled adults who would be happy to talk with you and share their own experiences. If you need specific information or advice, try to find a doctor, therapist, counselor or teacher with whom you can talk comfortably.

Dealing with Dependence

Every person is, in one way or another, dependent on others. Family members always depend on each other for many different things. As a disabled teenager, you may be more dependent on your family for assistance with everyday tasks like dressing, eating and getting around.

Transportation is a problem for all teenagers. However, since most public transportation systems are not fully accessible, teenagers with disabilities are even more dependent on family and older friends who drive, for transportation to and from social activities than their non-disabled peers. Have you ever felt frustrated or disappointed because there was no one who could drive you to a party or take you to visit a friend? Looking back, we remember how much our social life was restricted when we were younger because we couldn't get around by ourselves.

Some of this dependence is a reality of our lives. But each of us has to look at this problem honestly—to find out how much we can minimize our dependency. We need to ask, Is too much being done *for* us?

Are You Too Hemmed In?

Many parents encourage their disabled children to test their capabilities as much as possible. But others fear that their children will be unnecessarily exposed to danger and try to prevent them from experimenting and trying to do things on their own. They may see you as physically fragile and more limited than you actually are.

Have you ever felt that your parents were being too protective of you? Parents have fears about the welfare of all of their children, but they tend to act more protectively toward a child who is disabled. Protectiveness probably stems from their love and concern for you. Like your non-disabled peers, you probably want the freedom to go out by yourself, to have new and different experiences.

Sometimes you may be able to work out a solution by talking things over with your parents. John, who uses a wheelchair, wanted to go by himself to a shopping center about a half mile from his house. Many of his school friends met there at the hamburger place on Saturdays. John's parents insisted there were too many heavily-trafficked streets to cross and said they would gladly continue to drive him. When he explained how important it was for him to go there on his own, they agreed to work out a mutually acceptable solution.

Together they mapped out a route which took him a little out of the way, but had stop lights on all the busy corners. A red flag attached to the side of his wheelchair further assured them that he would be safe. John wasn't too happy about the flag but decided it was better to keep it on and joke about it with his friends. The important thing was that he now could go alone to meet his classmates.

Learn to Do More for Yourself

If you have been overly protected for most of your life, attempting to achieve independence may be difficult. It will take time, determination and patience. Pick out one thing to work on, and when you've mastered it, move on to something else. For example, Dave decided that on Sunday mornings he would make breakfast for the family. He started out with simple things like toast, jam and juice, and initially accepted some help from his mother. He found that his blindness was less and less of a problem as he became more familiar with the kitchen and different utensils. Slowly he worked up to more elaborate dishes, like pancakes made from scratch.

Don't forget to give yourself credit for your efforts even if things don't go so well the first few times. Remember that you are learning from your experiences and that mistakes are often the best teachers. The important thing is that you are trying new behaviors and activities.

If you want to try to do something for yourself that you haven't tried before, tell your parents about it and ask them if you can try. Explain why it's important for you to learn to do it on your own. If daily activities have always been arranged for you, as if you were still a child, let your parents know you want to participate in planning and decision-making.

For instance, you can arrange a trip. You can make your own plans for a weekend visit to a friend's home or, like Rita, a teenager with a severe visual impairment, you can take responsibility for shopping for clothes you will need for the next school term. Rita worked out a budget and some guidelines with her parents and then went to a local clothing store with her friend. She found out that she had a definite preference for certain styles and textures and asked her friend's advice on colors.

Look for Creative Solutions

As an independent adult, you will need to be able to make your own decisions and plan your own activities. Because of your disability, you will often have to think of alternate ways of doing things, to figure out how to change or adapt certain aspects of physical surroundings in order to increase your mobility.

If you have a hearing impairment you may want to investigate gadgets that will enable you to wake up in the morning without assistance from your family. A light attached to a timer or a device that shakes the bed are two methods used by many people with hearing disabilities. Railings along steps can be an important aid if you are visually impaired or walk with the aid of a cane.

Jim, who has limited use of his arms and hands, discovered he could dress more quickly and easily by selecting turtlenecks, or shirts with snaps instead of buttons. Replacing zippers with strips of Velcro is another trick that eliminates a lot of frustration and saves valuable time in the morning. You may be interested to know that some manufacturers are now making jeans and clothes specially designed for people with disabilities.

Some adaptations can be made just by using your common sense. Other times you may need to get advice. Someone who has the same disability can be very helpful. It's important to think about these things and make plans. Don't put it off. Now is the time to begin.

Asking for Help

Disabled teenagers are sometimes more dependent on their families for assistance than non-disabled teenagers. You may not be able to get around the neighborhood by yourself. You may have to ask your sister to push your wheelchair or go to the store for you. It can be frustrating, especially if brothers or sisters tell you they are too busy or just don't want to help you. You may be hurt or angry when your brother refuses to help or tells you to do something for yourself that you just can't do. Rita relied on her brother to read the television program listings to her. If they had just had a fight her brother would often refuse.

Keeping angry and hurt feelings to yourself can be harmful. Let your family know that you would love to be able to do everything for yourself, but that you really do need help with certain things. If your sister is busy or has something else to do, try to make arrangements for help at another time. Be considerate of your family's needs, too. And be sure that you don't ask for help that you don't need. Always make an honest effort to do as much as you can for yourself, but don't be ashamed to ask for help if you really need it.

Staying Home Alone

Have your parents ever hired a babysitter for you when they were going out even though you might have been old enough to stay at home by yourself? Some parents feel that disabled teenagers need someone to be with them all of the time. Your parents may have asked a brother or sister to stay home with you. This can be embarrassing, especially if the brother or sister is younger than you are. Parents may also send brothers with you when you go out on a date or to a party, or they may expect your sister to take you with her when she goes out.

If you want to stay home alone or go out by yourself, say so. Your parents may have some genuine fears. Encourage them to discuss these concerns with you and try to find ways to deal with them. If necessary, you and your parents might consider asking a neighbor to look in on you from time to time, or you could call a neighbor during the evening and let him know how you are doing.

It may help to have all the things you will need close by and within your reach. For instance, it's important to be familiar with phone numbers you might need in an emergency. You can keep a list of them in a convenient place. Are you able to use the phone by yourself? If not, there are special devices to assist you. Check with the local telephone company. Give careful thought to other special arrangements that can be made to assure your parents that you will be able to take care of yourself and handle any emergencies that might arise.

When Janet, who is mobility impaired and uses canes, talked to her parents about staying alone, she found out that they had a strong fear that she could be trapped in the house if there were a fire. Practice fire drills proved that she could get out of the house quickly without assistance. Be creative. Plan these things together. They don't have to be planned *for* you.

Parental Expectations

Do you sometimes feel that your parents' expectations for you are different from their expectations for your brothers and sisters? Parental expectations can sometimes be downright unrealistic. Your parents may expect you to achieve much less or they may expect you to accomplish much more than your brothers and sisters. Your parents may put great emphasis upon your intellectual abilities and expect you to do well in school, as if intelligence somehow compensates for physical limitations. They may insist that you develop musical or artistic abilities that do not interest you.

Each person has some limitations in certain areas and abilities in other areas. Joining outside activities can help you discover your abilities and interests. Be proud of them and choose the ones you most want to develop.

Parents sometimes base their expectations on what they believe are normal standards. For example, a parent may insist that an orthopedically disabled youngster learn to walk with braces or crutches even though this expectation is not always related to actual physical potential and can cause a great deal of frustration. A wheelchair may not be the usual way to get around, but using a wheelchair gives those of us who can only walk short distances the opportunity to achieve mobility and independence.

Remember, what is normal for someone else may not be normal for you. If you are visually handicapped, reading in braille can be normal for you. If you have severe speech difficulties, communicating with an alphabet board may be normal for you.

Special Treatment

Most disabled teenagers *do* feel that they are treated differently from their brothers and sisters—though the difference may be very subtle. You may be seen as much younger than you actually are because you have not had opportunities to develop socially. Some disabled adults can remember being the perennial "kid" in the family even when they were going to high school. Parents may deny or be unaware that they are doing this to you and may not realize that it affects the whole family.

Do your brothers and sisters feel resentful or jealous because they think your parents expect more from them than they do from you, or that they let you get away with too much? This is not uncommon. Parents are often more lenient with disabled children. You might even enjoy this special treatment, but it can also lead you to believe that you will always be able to get away with actions that other people are not permitted to do.

It is important to remember that you are responsible for your behavior. As you grow older, you will find that other people are not as lenient and tolerant as your parents may be. For instance, future roommates will expect you to keep the apartment neat and help with the cleaning.

Everyone should have chores to do, including you! Chores are not always fun, but it's important to have the feeling that you are doing your share and that you are a part of the family. Do you wish there *were* more things you were expected to do? That's how many disabled teens feel.

Why not talk this over with your parents, and see if you can do more than you are doing now? For instance, even if your disability makes it impossible to prepare food or cook, you might be able to read recipe directions for your mother while she is cooking. Or you might be able to hand your father tools while he is doing repair work, sort the laundry or set the table.

It is good to learn how tasks like cooking, cleaning and laundry are properly done even if you can't do them without assistance. This knowledge will be very helpful in your adult life if you need to supervise a personal care attendant. Each of us can find out for ourselves what *parts* of chores we *can* do. There's probably a lot more you can learn and accomplish than anyone realizes.

How Do Your Relatives Treat You?

Other family members, like grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, often give a disabled child special treatment. Have you ever been given gifts or money by your grandparents when your brothers and sisters were not? You may have been happy to get a present, but you might have also felt somewhat guilty or embarrassed. You may not like the idea of "standing out" from everybody else.

Other problems seem to come up at family gatherings. Relatives may forget that blindness does not affect your hearing and talk to you in a loud and forceful manner. You may be singled out for a special seat at the dining table or in the living room—isolated from other family members who have to make a special effort to come over to talk. You may not have the freedom to move around, and may be stuck in one place while your brothers, sisters and cousins move around easily. Relatives' houses often have steps at the entrance, and they very rarely have ramps. If you use a wheelchair, you may have to be carried into and out of the house.

Perhaps your relatives are not aware of or do not understand your feelings about all of these things. They may have difficulty dealing with the fact that you are disabled and may try to ignore your disability. Sometimes, relatives expect a disabled family member to be happy-go-lucky all of the time, to be pleasant and smiling, as though he or she had no real feelings and needs. Try to communicate with your relatives. If you don't tell family members how you feel and what you need, they will go on believing that you are happy and satisfied.

As with parents, you can begin by sharing this booklet with them and encouraging them to discuss their thoughts about some of the issues that are important to you. You can ask if a ramp can be built so you can get in and out of the house more easily, or you may want to find out about a portable ramp. If used with caution and common sense, a portable ramp can be a workable alternative. You can let your relatives know that you don't want to be isolated, that you don't want to be treated differently. If you want to be included in activities with your brothers, sisters and cousins, tell them. Suggest ways that you can participate. Once they understand, you probably won't have to remind them.

Though some of us may be lucky enough to be included in family activities in a relaxed and natural way, most of us encounter some problems with relatives. Attitudes do not change easily; the best way to begin is to share feelings openly and honestly.

Your Social Life

The basis for all friendship is mutual respect and the sharing of ideas, feelings and experiences. Friendships will enrich your life and expand your horizons. Remember that you have just as much to share and give as any other person in a friendship. You can meet potential friends almost anywhere—at school, clubs, camp, on your block. The more you participate in activities and develop an open and easy way of communicating with people, the easier it will be to make friends.

You may tend to have only disabled friends. This may result from your own choice or from the lack of opportunities to meet non-disabled teenagers. On the other hand, if you are attending a regular public school, you might find yourself in a situation where you are the only disabled person in your group.

Most people like to have a broad range of friends. As one disabled teen said, "I love my disabled friends, but I also want to have friends who are not disabled." This is very natural. It's good to share feelings, excitement and fears with other disabled teens who are experiencing many of the same things that you are experiencing. You can exchange solutions to practical living situations and learn from one another. It's also good to socialize with and learn from non-disabled friends.

In any case, the quality of your friendships is the important thing. Socializing with all kinds of people plays a major part in developing the unique person inside each one of us. Friendship is a very important aspect of life. Friendship, like a proper diet, helps us to grow.

Getting Out and Around

We all look forward to going shopping, to parties and out on dates. At times you may feel that you are not doing as much as you would like. Inaccessible public transportation presents many problems for disabled teens. Wheelchair lifts in buses, elevators to underground transit systems, and signs in large print are some of the accommodations that can be used to make public transportation more accessible to disabled people.

Organizations for disabled adults, such as the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, California, and the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities in Washington, D.C., are working hard to make public transportation accessible. You might want to join a similar group in your area to find out more about this issue and work to promote accessible transportation.

Some communities have Dial-A-Ride services that provide transportation for people with physical disabilities. There are usually restrictions on use of the service and there is often a fee. You might want to investigate it as a possible resource.

Have you ever said "No" to someone who asked you out because you were not able to use public transportation to meet them? You can solve this problem by doing things near your own home. You can go to a show in your neighborhood, or meet at a nearby restaurant or ice cream shop. Be aware of, and open to, alternative ways of doing things. Be resourceful. There is usually more than one way to get what you want.

Another solution to the problem of transportation is to learn how to drive a car yourself. Not every person with a physical disability is able to drive safely. Information about evaluations to determine your ability, special adaptive equipment for cars and driver's training can be obtained from your State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The American Automobile Association (AAA) publishes a booklet entitled *The Handicapped Driver's Mobility Guide* which is available for a small fee from your local AAA club.

Careful Planning Pays Off

If you have a physical disability, it is usually necessary to do some thoughtful planning before going out with friends. Planning ahead is essential to having a relaxed and enjoyable time. Are the doorways going to be too narrow? How will I get my money out of my pocket? Who will feed me? How am I going to get to the bathroom? These may be some of the questions you will ask yourself before deciding to join your friends.

Call the place you are going to and ask specific questions. Is the place accessible to a person in a wheelchair? Be sure the person you are talking with understands exactly what is meant by accessibility. If it is not accessible, how many stairs are there? How wide is the bathroom door? Are there braille markings inside the elevators? Remember, no one knows your disability or your needs as well as you do.

Now that you know the physical situation, you can make a sensible decision. Perhaps you will want to ask someone to travel there with you. If you do need help, explain your needs in a simple way.

Jerry, who is a quadriplegic as a result of a swimming accident, tells of an important lesson he learned while adjusting to his disability. He made plans to attend a fine restaurant in his hometown with some friends. He knew that he would be able to get into the dining room because the entrance of the restaurant was level with the sidewalk. Transportation had been arranged. It turned out to be an enjoyable evening, except for one very important aspect. The rest room was not accessible. Jerry had not thought to ask about that. He learned a very valuable but uncomfortable lesson that evening. Take *nothing* for granted.

Don't let the extra effort required for planning discourage you from joining in activities with friends. Remember that the more experience you have in dealing with challenging situations, the less frightening they become—and the more independent *you* become. You will find that things will be easier as you become more familiar with a variety of situations.

Going out with friends is a rewarding experience. If you are not able to go out, and/or cannot get into your friends' houses because they are inaccessible, invite them over to your house. Explain that it is easier for them to visit you. They will probably understand and be happy to come to your place.

Dating and Parties

Dating is an activity that causes a lot of excitement and anxiety for all teenagers during the growing up years. As a disabled teenager, you might not have the same opportunities and freedom as other teenagers. Therefore you may not be able to go out on as many dates. This does not mean that you are not appealing and attractive to other people. You might feel hesitant to go on dates because of the nature of your disability. For instance, if you have a speech impairment, you may be concerned about having to repeat yourself when people don't understand you.

Don't be worried if you're not going out on dates at all. Many teens, both disabled and non-disabled, don't date until much later on. Join in as many activities as possible. Marie, who uses a wheelchair, felt self-conscious about going to school dances but also hated sitting home and feeling left out. She decided to start volunteering to take tickets or work at the refreshment stand. It was a good opportunity to be with her classmates and socialize in a non-threatening way. Gradually she felt comfortable enough to get out on the dance floor.

Some disabled teenagers feel that going to parties is too much trouble, too embarrassing or too uncomfortable. One bad experience can have you saying, "I'm never going to a party with non-disabled teens again." Don't be so hasty. Think about the different people you have met and the good times you have had at parties.

You may want to examine your own feelings as well as other people's reactions and their attitudes toward you. You can try to be understanding, but at the same time you can try to be assertive in pointing out to yourself, and others, that you are a human being just like they are. Be yourself. Have fun. When Nick goes to a party, he's the first one out on the dance floor: "I dance in my wheelchair or on my knees. I love to party."

It's important not to go into a shell when something goes wrong or things are not happening as fast as you would like. Remember that many non-disabled teens are experiencing similar frustrations and disappointments. You're not the only one who has endured an embarrassing moment. A non-disabled young woman recalls the time in high school that she slid down a flight of stairs and ripped the hem of her dress at the first dance of the year. Her classmates laughed and kidded her about being clumsy. She was so embarrassed that she went home immediately and didn't venture out to a dance for the rest of the term.

Be as open as you can to experiences. Being involved in activities is the best way to develop social skills. All teens hate feeling left out. Don't make the mistake of leaving yourself out!

How You Look and Feel

Everyone is concerned about how they look. People of all ages worry about being too fat or too thin, their hair being too short or too curly, having too long a nose or ears that stick out. During the teen years concern with appearance is a major preoccupation. For disabled teens the concern is even more intense. Is my body normal-looking? Is my body as good as the next person's, even though I have short legs, or have an arm missing, or cannot walk, or see or hear?

It is true, your appearance may be different, but you have the same needs and feelings as every human being. Other people's reactions to you might make you angry or sad. It is okay to feel that way. But it may not be good to let those feelings control how you relate to yourself and other people. You are a full human being with an individualized body and mind. No two people have the same mind or body. You are no exception to the rule.

Good grooming habits and exercise can help you feel healthy and self-confident. Arlene, who has an orthopedic disability, started doing yoga: "Yoga relaxes me and gives me a good feeling about my body. I do it almost every night." Getting your hair cut in an attractive style, wearing the latest perfume, buying a pair of cowboy boots are some small ways that may help you feel good about yourself.

Your body is going through changes. During adolescence everyone goes through the same changes. You may find that you have a drive that attracts you to other people. You may have a strong desire to make yourself physically attractive to others and live your own life. These are healthy signs. You probably have questions about your sexual feelings and about your body. If you have an open and comfortable relationship with your parents, you may be able to talk with them. Talking to other teenagers, both disabled and non-disabled, and to disabled adults can be very helpful.

The goal of most people, disabled or able-bodied, is to someday meet a person with whom they can share their life and be physically intimate. The best way to work toward that goal is to develop your body and mind to their fullest potential. Reach out to people and share your thoughts and feelings. Trust and believe in yourself.

School Is Important

School is important to everyone. School means social life, athletic activities, being part of the group. It's a big part of life and is especially meaningful for someone who is disabled and may have difficulty getting out and being with friends in the neighborhood.

One of the questions you may face is whether to be fully mainstreamed into a regular junior high or high school; to attend a special school, either day or residential; or to be partially mainstreamed into a regular school that has a special program for handicapped students. Your choice will be based on your own needs and on your preferences.

There are more opportunities for teenagers with disabilities to go to regular schools today than ever before. Laws passed during the last decade affirm your right to the learning opportunities you need to become as self-sufficient and productive as possible.

Learning about your rights can be an adventure. It is not always easy; sometimes laws and regulations are difficult to understand. However, knowing your rights is an important part of becoming independent.

Special Schools

You and your parents may decide that a special school best serves your needs. In discussions with other disabled young people, we have found that some feel very comfortable associating exclusively with disabled teens and sharing the experiences they have in common. They point to the advantages of being in a special school where physical therapy, other special services, aids and specific kinds of assistance are available from a specially-trained permanent staff that is fully aware of the needs of physically handicapped individuals.

However, there can be disadvantages to attending a special school. Some teenage students who attend special day schools find that they must take long bus rides which may shorten their school day or leave little time for relaxation or enjoyment after school. Those who go to residential schools tell us that they feel cut-off from family life and neighborhood activities, since they only come home on weekends or on holidays.

If you have chosen a special school, you will want to make an effort to meet people and join activities outside the school environment. We suggest that you contact local agencies for disabled people to find out if there are recreational and social programs that you can join near your school or at home when you're on vacation.

More and more disabled teenagers talk about wanting to be part of regular classes in their neighborhood schools, wanting especially to belong to social groups where they live. It's natural to want to be part of a group that has lived through similar experiences, and it's also very natural to want to be in the mainstream.

Coping in a Regular School

If you are in a special school, you may be thinking about transferring to a regular school. You may want very much to be part of the same school as your sisters and brothers and other teenagers in your neighborhood. You have that right. Many disabled teenagers are now attending regular schools, are enjoying the experience and are succeeding in their studies.

It's a hard transition to change schools. It takes courage to leave familiar faces and a comfortable environment. Making new friends can be a real challenge. Most teens who go to a new school have feelings of worry and fear. When you are disabled, you may worry about reactions to your disability. Carl shared his feelings about transferring to a regular school: "I was afraid people wouldn't accept me. I was afraid they were thinking, 'Why is he in a wheelchair? Why can't he walk?' " Your adjustment can be a little easier if you know what other teenagers have discovered in the process of going from a special school for disabled students to a regular school.

Getting Beyond the Disability

Carl soon learned that most non-disabled teenagers have had little or no experience with disabilities. Staring is common at first. Your fellow students may have never seen a person who wears braces or uses a wheelchair or a cane to get around. If you have a hearing or speech disability, they may feel uncomfortable talking to you. Their reactions may make you hesitant to talk to them.

This is an awkward period that can be overcome as you begin to join in everyday activities. As non-disabled students become familiar with you, they will feel more relaxed. As you get to know each other, you will be able to accept each other as individuals.

Non-disabled people often have stereotyped attitudes about disabilities. Try to deal with their attitudes in a way that's comfortable for you. This may mean explaining your disability right away, or saying that you would rather wait until you know them before talking about this aspect of your life. It *is* irritating sometimes, when the first thing a non-disabled person says is, "What's wrong with you?" At times you might feel like saying, "First of all, nothing is 'wrong' with me. And secondly, I am a human being. I am a person with a disability."

Try to be understanding. Your classmates may be trying to get to know you better. Their lack of contact with people with disabilities may cause them to ask insensitive questions unintentionally. You may not realize it, but they probably feel nervous about saying the wrong thing.

Participation is Important

You may feel that your disability makes you stand out as *too* different from other students. This feeling may make you keep to yourself and try to attract as little attention as possible. You may be afraid to answer a question or give a presentation in front of the class.

It helps to realize that most teenage students feel self-conscious about having to speak before the whole class. It does take courage. Everyone is afraid of giving an incorrect answer or appearing foolish. Look at it as an opportunity for you to let your classmates know you better and see that you have many abilities.

If you have speech problems or use sign language, it can be difficult to communicate with students and with teachers. Your reaction may be to avoid contact with others. Don't make this mistake. Remember that your classmates and teachers *do* want to understand you—but it may take time. Patience helps in these situations.

Cindy, who has a severe speech impairment as a result of cerebral palsy, realizes that she made it very difficult for other students to get to know her. She recalls: "When I was in school, I didn't talk very much. I hated the sound of my voice. I figured no one would understand what I was saying anyway, so I avoided people. Boy, those were lonely years."

Don't isolate yourself. If you want to make friends you will have to reach out and share yourself with others. Friends gradually get very good at understanding what you're saying. At times, you may want to ask a close buddy to interpret your words. That's a considerate thing to do, and can help put everyone at ease.

It Helps to be Open

It's important to learn to be open and honest about your disability. If you try to hide it, to pretend that it really isn't there, you'll put too much pressure on yourself. Some disabled teens who are anxious to be accepted by others try to play down their disabilities and avoid contact with other disabled teens. This can make you feel tense and uneasy. The more natural you can be about the facts of your disability, the better.

Sally, who has spina bifida and uses a wheelchair, was often kidded by classmates on those unfortunate occasions when her urine bag leaked. Her initial way of dealing with this was to turn inward and avoid the other students. She realized that this behavior did not help her enjoy school or to make friends. She decided to explain her disability and its effects to the class. It took a lot of courage to do this. Afterwards, her classmates were more understanding and sympathetic with her embarrassment when something went wrong.

You may be tired of answering questions about your disability, explaining why you must use a wheelchair or a hearing aid. But it's helpful. Non-disabled students are curious. If you can answer some questions about the way you get around and do things in a matter-of-fact way, you will help them feel more at ease—better able to get to know you as a person.

Breaking the Ice

Maybe you feel that you will not know what to talk about with non-disabled teenagers, and that you have little in common with them. When you give it a try, you'll be surprised to find out how many interests you *do* share, and how much you can learn from each other.

Whatever your special hobbies or favorite activities are, you will probably be able to find someone who enjoys the same things. For instance, if you're a baseball fan, you're sure to find non-disabled classmates who root for the same team. That can be the basis for striking up a conversation and a friendship. School clubs are good places to meet people who enjoy the same things you do, and schools usually have clubs for just about every kind of interest from electronics to chess, to art appreciation and lots of other activities.

Non-disabled teens are usually surprised to find out that there are excellent basketball players who play in wheelchairs. Perhaps you play wheelchair basketball or have a friend who does. You can share this with your non-disabled classmates. They will probably be interested in the way you play, and you can help them see that it is just as challenging as a regular game. Invite a non-disabled teenager to come to one of your games and try shooting a ball from a wheelchair

Remember the more you join in regular activities, the easier it is to gain the acceptance you are seeking. Sometimes joining in may feel embarrassing. For instance, if you cannot eat in the usual way, can't help being a little messy, or need someone to assist you, you may think it's better not to eat in the cafeteria with everyone else. But if you don't eat with students who are not disabled, you will be shutting yourself off from the chance to meet and talk with them. The school cafeteria is a social meeting place and lunch hour is a time to relax with classmates. People will soon get used to having you around and they'll react to you as *you.*

Expectations Can Be a Trap

Many disabled teenagers push themselves too hard in order to excel in a regular school. They sometimes feel that they have to prove that they are not only equal to, but better than non-disabled students. They may neglect friends and social activities and spend all their extra time doing school work. If this is true of you, stop and think about what you're doing. Try for a more balanced outlook.

When Betty, a straight "A" student who uses a wheelchair, graduated from high school, she realized that she had a lot of book knowledge but still felt very ill at ease and uncomfortable around other people. It's important to be able to relax and kid around, to feel confident about talking with someone of the opposite sex and to know how to manage the give and take of a group conversation. These are skills you learn being with others and participating in activities.

You may also find you have to deal with a teacher's expectations of you. Classroom teachers in regular schools often have limited experience with disabled students and they may not realize your capabilities. They may expect less from a disabled student and may allow you to get away with doing less work. You may receive a better grade than you deserve—and in the long run, end up being cheated because you are learning less. Resentment from other students in the class can also lead to serious problems if you really aren't being required to live up to the same academic standards as they are.

Bob, who is legally blind, went through three years of high school taking easy courses and doing the minimum amount of work. His teachers never confronted him with his lazy study habits and gave him passing grades. When he decided at the end of his junior year that he really did want to go to college, he found out that his academic record wasn't good enough. Don't kid yourself. If you are not really doing your schoolwork and just "getting by," you will be the loser.

Getting What You Need

Some disabled students confuse being "super" people with being independent; they feel that they *must* be able to do everything by themselves. It can be very difficult to admit that you need help, but it's important to learn how to ask. You will probably find that you can do more (and do it a lot better) by requesting and accepting assistance from other people when you need it.

Everyone needs help at some time or other. Maybe you can arrange a trade-off: a non-disabled classmate may need help with a particular subject you are good at—like math or English. Reaching out to other people, accepting that you *do* sometimes require help, is actually a way to become increasingly independent.

You can help yourself, too, by talking to your regular teachers about your needs. For example, you should ask for a seat in the front of the room if that will help you see what's written on the chalkboard or to speech-read when the teacher is lecturing. If you are blind, or visually impaired, it's a good idea to ask the teacher to read aloud what he or she writes on the board. If you have difficulty taking notes, explain why you would like to use a tape recorder or have a note-taker assigned to you. Or, another student may be happy to give you a copy of his or her notes.

Remember that teachers and classmates will not always be understanding and cooperative. It's important to be honest with yourself about the kind of help you need, and be clear and polite in asking for it. In most cases people will respond in a positive manner.

Stepping-stone to a Job

Some students feel that they want to move right into a paying job after high school. Careful planning and proper training can pave the way to employment after graduation. Remember, you will need skills that are in demand by employers to qualify for a job.

If immediate work is your preference, or if you are interested in exploring your work-related abilities, vocational education is an option that you will want to talk about with the guidance counselor early in your high school career, even in junior high. The range of programs differs in each community and may include training in office work, auto mechanics, appliance repair, home economics or health occupations, in addition to programs in many other career fields. If you plan to get into a vocational education program, you should find out what courses are required in order to be admitted. Your counselor, or an interested teacher, can help you.

Remember that you have a right to an appropriate vocational education. You also have the right to find work you like to do and are able to do. Beware of stereotypes. A guidance counselor may suggest that because of the nature of your disability, you are suited to work *only* in certain career fields. Cheryl, whose disability limits her finger movements, was discouraged from pursuing a career in office work. A hand splint enabled her to learn typing and other office skills. At the end of the training program, Cheryl was able to qualify for an entry level job in a library, a field that interested her.

You need to be realistic, but don't sell yourself short. Think about modifications that would make it possible to do the kind of work that appeals to you. Speak up if you feel you are being guided into an area of training that doesn't interest you.

Beyond High School

School counselors, teachers, and parents often expect disabled teenagers to make plans in advance for what they will do when they get out of high school. The fact that you may be expected to know exactly what you will do and how you will do it may make you feel resentful. Many teenagers (whether they're disabled or not) don't have clear ideas about what they will do in the future.

As a disabled teen, you may feel you don't yet know enough about yourself and your capabilities, or about the opportunities that will be available to you when you finish school. You have probably been advised that you must be "realistic" and that you must make plans that are possible for you to carry out. You can become confused because you really don't know what's realistic for you, and you may feel put-down when you are told what you can and cannot do.

Sometimes, adults feel that they have to protect a disabled person from failure and try to limit choices of goals to those they feel can be achieved. It's fair for you to have the opportunity to set your own goals and attempt to fulfill them, and if things don't work out, the right to try something else. This can be one of the best ways to learn about yourself, and grow in strength and maturity. You don't need to know exactly what you want to do right now, but it's a good idea to start thinking about goals and how to achieve them.

Choosing a Career

Take advantage of every opportunity during your school years to learn about yourself and your abilities and to explore different career fields that interest you. Ask questions about jobs, read about them, watch people performing them if you can. Find out about the kind of training that is required and the availability of jobs in a variety of fields.

Start with your interests. Then, think about possible work options. If communication is one of your strong points, you may want to explore teaching, possible careers in broadcasting, or positions that require good writing skills or strengths in sales. A strong desire to be of service to others may be a clue that you should research the helping professions: medicine, social work, counseling. The variety of possible jobs is mind-boggling! Don't limit yourself to the obvious choices.

Talk to the school guidance counselor and the librarian at your local public library about reference books that could be helpful in investigating careers. Take some time to look at the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* published by the Department of Labor. This is a real eye-opener about literally hundreds of careers. It tells you the kind of training required to do the work and the prospects for future growth in the field.

It may seem that investigating jobs and careers is hard work. It is. However, the time and energy you invest now will pay high dividends after graduation. Only *you* can make the important decisions that can bring you job satisfaction and fulfillment. Isn't your happiness worth the extra time and effort? Remember, your future will be much brighter if you plan for it.

Have You Thought About College?

Is college for you? It's an important question that is certainly worth thinking about. Margie, who is a paraplegic as a result of a horseback-riding accident, and now works as a speech therapist, remembers making the decision to continue her education: "I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to handle college—the heavy coursework, problems with accessibility—but I decided to give it a try. Sure it was hard work, but I also had a lot of fun times. I can honestly say that it was worth all the hassles."

A college education can offer many stimulating growth experiences and can open doors to careers that require advanced training. Until recently, students with handicaps were almost completely excluded from college programs. However, this has changed. Qualified disabled students are now exercising their right to equal opportunities to participate in post-secondary education programs. As a result, over the past few years, many colleges and other post-secondary learning programs have made changes and adaptations so that their curriculums, buildings, laboratories, dormitories, student centers, gyms and all other facilities can be used by disabled students.

It's never too early to start thinking about college and discussing your ideas and plans with parents, teachers and guidance counselors. Your grades, interests and financial situation will all influence your decision and the selection of a particular school. You will want to write for catalogues, compare programs, investigate resources for financial aid and evaluate the accessibility of different campuses. If possible, try to visit schools that interest you to see for yourself how accessible campuses are. Most important, you will want to plan your high school program to include the courses necessary for college admission.

When you decide to take the college entrance exam, be sure to check into special accommodations for your disability. Arrangements can be made to take the exams under conditions that will accurately test your abilities. High school counselors can tell you more about this, or write to: Admissions Testing Program, Services for Handicapped Students, Box 592, Princeton, New Jersey 08541.

Many colleges have a disabled student service office, run by disabled students themselves. This service may be able to provide information, counseling and referrals to trained personal care attendants. Some outstanding programs will train you in self-management of an attendant and may even provide a training program for attendants. Be sure to ask about this important resource when you write to different schools.

If you are not sure you want to go to a traditional four-year college or university, you may want to consider a community college or a two-year college program. Tuition at community colleges is generally low or free to residents, and these schools may be close to your home. You can train in a variety of skill areas, including computer programming, retail marketing, hotel management and childcare. Some students decide to continue their education after the completion of the two-year college program, and transfer to a four-year college to complete their last two years. A word of caution—be aware that most colleges have rules about the number and type of credits they will accept from a transfer student.

Is college for you? Before you decide, be sure to do some serious thinking. Gather information and talk to college students, disabled and non-disabled, about their experiences. If you are afraid or nervous, remember that these feelings are natural and shared by many high school students.

Vocational Rehabilitation Can Help

Chances are you've heard of Vocational Rehabilitation. If not, keep reading! You will certainly want to learn more about this nationwide program which could be an important resource for you.

The purpose of Vocational Rehabilitation, a federal-state program, is to provide services that will enable people with disabilities to enter the job market. There is a vocational rehabilitation agency in each state, and local offices exist in or near most cities. Services may include evaluation, counseling, placement, training, follow-up and many other types of assistance. To be eligible, a person must have a physical or mental disability which is a substantial handicap to employment, and there must be a reasonable expectation that he or she will benefit from these services and become employed. Many states offer services for the visually impaired through a separate agency, the State Commission for the Blind.

If you need special equipment, readers, interpreters and other aids to enable you to attend college, your state agency may be able to help with the costs for these services. Sometimes, partial or full funding for tuition can be provided. Mark, who hopes to become a radio broadcaster, is completing his degree in communications with financial assistance from the State Commission for the Blind.

It's a good idea to get in touch with your state agency during high school to find out if you are eligible for services. A vocational rehabilitation counselor will be able to discuss your future job and career plans with you. In talking with a counselor, it's important to express your interests and goals in a clear and assertive way. Remember that you are a full participant in making these important decisions that will affect your life.

Your school guidance counselor, the local office of the State Employment Service, or the "State Government" listings in the phone directory may be of assistance in obtaining the address and phone number of your state agency or State Commission for the Blind. If you have difficulty finding this information, write to Closer Look for a list of state agencies.

The transition from school to the world of work is not easy. There may be many difficulties and disappointments along the way. The vocational rehabilitation agency may be able to help you overcome obstacles and reach your employment goal. It's a resource worth investigating.

Getting Work Experience

You've probably heard the story of the recent graduate looking for a job. Employers keep saying, "Yes, I'm sure you would do a good job for us, but we're looking for a person who has some experience." In exasperation, the applicant exclaims, "How will I ever get experience if no one will hire me?"

There is a lot of competition for jobs today. An employer may have dozens of applicants for a single position. Often, they look for someone who has already demonstrated that he or she is capable and has good work habits, such as reliability, punctuality and the ability to get along with co-workers. Part-time and summer jobs can develop skills and behavior that will make you attractive to potential employers and can provide you with employment references. Even more important, they will give you an opportunity to learn about different types of work and to meet new people.

Remember that most teens, including non-disabled teens, go through a series of part-time jobs. Often this kind of work is temporary or seasonal. Being laid off is to be expected under these circumstances—it's not the end of the world, so don't let it affect your self-confidence.

Participation in school clubs and other extracurricular activities is another excellent way of gaining valuable experience which can be helpful when you are looking for a job. Were you a member of the student council or an officer of a club? Did you volunteer at the school radio station or school store? These activities can demonstrate leadership qualities, as well as capabilities.

A Word About Job Interviews

Everyone gets "stage fright" at the thought of sitting across the desk from a potential employer. You may feel that interviews are extra hard for you because of your disability. In some cases, this may be true, and this is part of your reality.

A fun technique that may help you is role playing interview situations. Find someone (maybe a brother or sister) who has been through a number of job interviews and is likely to know the types of questions employers will ask. Imagine that this is a real interview and that your friend is the potential employer. Notice your reactions and the questions that give you difficulty.

Afterwards, talk with your friend. What kind of impression did you make? Were your answers to questions concise and informative? Was your explanation of necessary accommodations clear? How can you improve? Now do it again. Practice will probably decrease your nervousness and will also help you become more assertive. It may be a good idea to role play with different people and to vary the mood and attitude of the interviewer—curious, pleasant, hostile, nervous. You may want to switch roles and see how your friend handles an interview. Role playing is a learning experience, but it can also be fun. Enjoy yourself!

An Independent Life

You need to think carefully about what independence means for you. How can you take charge of your life? How can you minimize the effects of your disability? Remember that *all* people have limitations. Those who lead full and active lives concentrate on their abilities and learn how to work around their limitations.

Julie, who uses a wheelchair as a result of polio, majored in journalism in college and now works as a newspaper editor. She loves her work and is good at it. Julie admits that she faced many difficulties in reaching her career goal and is still overcoming obstacles. She has a very definite idea of what it means to be independent: "I want to set my own goals and make the decisions that will affect my life. To me, that's what independence is all about."

Making your own choices and decisions is a big part of independence. Right now, your parents probably give you guidance, and may even have the final say in many things. However, as you grow older, you will be able to assume more and more responsibility for your life. If you want to be ready for the really big decisions, like choice of a job or marriage partner, you need to start now with other issues.

Does independence mean being able to drive a car? If you need the assistance of a personal care attendant, can you still be independent? Dan, a quadriplegic who works as a clinical psychologist, has some opinions on these issues:

> "I need the assistance of an attendant and I can't drive, yet I still feel that I am living an independent life. To me, independence doesn't mean being able to do everything, or not needing other people. I've been able to organize my life in a way that is very satisfying to me. I have a successful career, travel and enjoy cultural events in my city. I love being with people and have a lot of friends. Sure, I have some limitations, but who doesn't?"

Eric, a high school student who has speech and hearing disabilities, has a slightly different view of what it means to be independent:

> "Independence means being fully me. I have a lot of feelings, abilities and dreams. Independence means freeing what's inside of me and letting it come out. I love to work on cars and I'm really good at it. When I graduate I want to work as a car mechanic. I also enjoy writing poetry for fun. Because of my speech problems, I can express myself a lot better in writing. Who knows, someday, I might even write a book! I feel I have a lot to contribute to the world I live in."

Like Eric, you have a lot to contribute. You have talents and abilities that are waiting to be developed. It's up to you. The road will probably not be easy. It never is.

But remember, you have the inner strength necessary to reach your goals. Throughout this booklet, we've suggested ways in which you can assert yourself and participate in the decision-making that affects your life. It's *your* life! You may not realize it, but you are preparing for your future independence *right now.*

You Are Not Alone

There are many people and organizations that can assist you as you grow toward a more independent life. National and local organizations exist for just about every disability you can think of, and these groups can often provide you with important information and guidance. Finding these resources in your community may not always be easy. It may take some time, so don't get discouraged. Start by checking the yellow pages under the "Social Service Organizations" section, or contact the local vocational rehabilitation agency and ask for the names of organizations that are specifically concerned with your disability. If you live in a small town, there may not be an organization in the immediate area. However, keep searching and you will probably find that there is a group in a nearby city.

Many of these organizations publish newsletters that come out periodically; often there is a charge. These publications usually contain valuable information that can keep you up-to-date on a variety of topics, including items on new or improved auxiliary aids and equipment, legal information regarding your rights and stories about disabled people working in the mainstream. You may want to think about subscribing to a newsletter; it can be a wise investment of your money and reading time.

We've talked about the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, California. This Center is one of many programs that provide services to help disabled people live independently in the community. There may be a center in your area. You can request a list of independent living programs by writing to: Department of Education, Clearinghouse on the Handicapped, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Room 3106, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202.

This is the Beginning

We hope this booklet has answered some of your questions and given you ideas of how you can plan for a more independent life. We would like to leave you with the reminder that we have experienced the feelings and difficulties described on these pages, and have been able to find solutions to many of the problems. Some problems are not solved easily. We are always searching for ways to eliminate or modify physical barriers in our environment so that we can meet our personal needs. Changing stereotyped attitudes toward people with disabilities takes time and requires patience and persistent effort.

We believe that disabled people have the same rights as other individuals, particularly the right to enjoy full participation in the life of the community. In spite of many obstacles, we are now living independently in the city of Berkeley. We *know* that independent living for people with disabilities can be a reality.

This is the end of our booklet, but we hope that for you it is just the beginning—the beginning of a satisfying and independent life. It's a goal worth striving for!

Some Additional Reading

There are many books, some of them specifically concerned with disabled people, that can be helpful as you begin to think about and plan an independent life. A librarian, teacher or guidance counselor can probably help you develop a reading list suited to your needs. Here are a few books that we think you won't want to miss:

Don't Say Yes When You Want To Say No
by Herbert Fensterheim, Ph.D., and Jean Baer. New York, New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1975. 304 pp.

This book can help you recognize your strengths and express yourself in a clear and direct way. Examples and exercises demonstrate how you can learn to be assertive in your everyday life.

See Me More Clearly
by Joyce Slayton Mitchell. New York, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980. 284 pp.

This is a career and life-planning book written especially for teens with physical disabilities. It presents important and practical information on a variety of topics including: getting around, making friends, dealing with parents, sports participation and knowing your rights.

What Color Is Your Parachute?— A Practical Manual For Job-Hunters & Career-Changers
by Richard Nelson Bolles. Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 1981. 320 pp.

This book can be a valuable guide as you decide on job objectives and career goals. It contains many practical exercises that will help you explore your interests and skills and use this knowledge to plan your future.