

Aide learning how not to help

By Cathy Johnson

Sometimes helping a handicapped student means learning you should not offer any help. Amy Kuchar, 21, an attendant to a handicapped student in Brazos House, has found that withholding assistance is an important part of her job.

"I learned to be patient," says Kuchar. "It's hard to watch them (handicapped persons) struggle, but it makes them learn."

One of nine live-in attendants here, Kuchar receives \$2.50 per hour for a 15-hour week. However, on her own, she works seven days a week with her roommate, Janice Webb, 24, a quadriplegic.

Her duties include helping with personal hygiene, performing small tasks and keeping the dorm room clean. Especially necessary, she says, is making sure the floor is clean for Webb's wheelchair to move without obstruction.

Webb, a sophomore accounting major from Waco, has been here for two years. Besides carrying a full course load, she attends the PE for Handicapped class. She and her husband plan to open a garage in the future.

Kuchar has been an attendant for two semesters. Mary Gonzales, her backup attendant, takes over when she needs time off. Both have attended government-supported workshops for

attendants offered each semester through the Educational Support Services Office here.

Kuchar and Webb were friends before Kuchar became the attendant. "We lived across the hall from each other and would talk," Kuchar said. "We're really close, like sisters."

The helping goes two ways, she said. "She's older so I go to her with my problems and she helps me to solve them."

A criminal justice junior, Kuchar says she wants to work in delinquent counseling after graduation. Before becoming an attendant she was a children's recreational director for the Presbyterian Home in Waxahachie.

Despite this social service background, Kuchar recalls being scared when she first met a handicapped student. "I had never been around anybody in a wheelchair before."

Preconceptions about the handicapped are common, she said, and they need to be dispelled. A feeling of awkwardness in the presence of someone who has a handicap is not unusual.

"Many people have trouble talking and meeting handicapped people," she said. "People are curious. They don't want to get caught staring; it's difficult for them because they have been taught not to stare."

Pact begins Dec. 9