

Handicapped student suggests improvement

By Pam Gilbert

Having your own set of wheels doesn't necessarily make it easy to get around Arlington.

When the wheels belong to a chair, you can't run errands or visit friends any time you want. If you aren't handicapped and lack transportation, you share the same problem but have an option wheelchair users don't — call a taxi.

"That service is provided for other citizens. It should be provided for everyone," says Sam Provence, who's organizing a consumer group of handicapped persons in Arlington.

The organization, tentatively called the Arlington Handicapped Study Group, is scheduled to meet for the first time 7 a.m. Saturday at Provence's home, 1007 E. Lovers Lane.

"First, we've got to identify the major problems, and then list them in terms of priority," he said. "Then we've got to attack these problems with solutions.

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Results of the study will be issued in written form to Arlington city officials before the end of the year, he said.

An estimated one person in seven is now or will at some time be handicapped, according to the Easter Seal Society, said Jim Hayes, head of the Educational Services Support office here. He estimated that there are now between 140 to 150 handicapped students at UTA.

Provence, 27, who cannot use either arm and has only slight use of one leg, elaborated on several of the proposals.

Taxi service— A van equipped with a wheelchair lift should be purchased by the city, he said, to provide transportation. Provence believes the cost should be no different than what nonhandicapped residents pay for cab service. Presently, disabled Tarrant County residents can obtain some transportation, but only to and from medical or social welfare services.

Rodger Coble, owner of the City Cab Co., recently requested that the city council establish a rate for users of a vehicle which presently transports handicapped Arlington residents to medical services.

Coble said his company would "welcome the idea of having a service



SAM PROVENCE

for the handicapped" such as Provence suggested, if the council decides to apply for federal funds and offers the contract to his company.

Housing—Provence would like to see a group of disabled residents sign a contract with a local apartment complex, establishing a section for handicapped residents. A few changes in accessibility would be included in the contract, and the group would hire a certain number of attendants, thus enabling them to cut costs.

Such an operation exists in Houston, where four complexes allow the residents to share attendant costs and have a degree of independence. Provence believes it would be a success here, as there, where a list of would-be tenants continues to grow.

The problem would be to find a complex that is already fairly accessible, he said, and in the right location for the majority of the residents.

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Job placement—A clearing house-type employment service is needed to contact prospective employers and arrange interviews. This is one of the biggest needs of the handicapped, who are sometimes discriminated against because they are believed to be "sickly" and unable to hold down a job, said the graduate history student.

With the right facilities and job training, many employers would realize that such beliefs are unfounded, Provence said.

"This would take many disabled persons off welfare and social security, making them productive citizens."

Various ordinances—Provence believes an ordinance should be in effect which requires that, when a curb is replaced, a wheelchair ramp should be installed. When a new firm builds an apartment complex, a certain number of units should be accessible to wheelchairs.

All public facilities and buildings, such as the subcourthouse, city hall and annex, and public parks, should have ramps and more sidewalks, he said.

Provence, who cofounded the Handicapped Students Association (HSA) here in 1968, said he anticipates the same basic problems in the city-level effort as the HSA did initially.

"When the handicapped students at UTA first asked for changes, university officials didn't feel they should be given high priority," he recalled. "It took persistence but once a few changes were made, the attitude completely changed.

"At first they (the administrators) were hesitant; they didn't know if it would work or not. Now they've seen it can, and they're very pleased with the results."

Since 1972, UTA has lowered water fountains and telephone booths, altered restrooms, created more handicapped parking areas and made improvements in ramps and curbs. Among the latest improvements is the paid attendant program, which allows students to live at Pahl and Brazos halls, instead of at home or in a nursing home.

Provence also cited the addition of special physical education classes to the curriculum, and a future modification of the swimming pool.

But even with all these changes, UTA is still behind campuses in California and Illinois, Provence said. UTA is ranked "very well in the Southwest" but campuses such as Berkeley and Southern Illinois have emerged as the leaders in innovations for handicapped residents.

For more information about the Arlington Handicapped Study Group, contact Provence at 265-6377.