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# East School students learn of handicaps through puppet show

By Judy Enright  
Patriot Ledger Staff

HINGHAM — "You're sharing your school with very special friends next year," Judy Clarke told a class of East School fifth-graders last week. "They will be severely handicapped. You have to have as much sympathy for them as you do for Mark and Ellen Jane."

Mark and Ellen Jane are puppets that Judy and other Junior League of Boston members take on an annual road show throughout the area to explain various physical and mental handicaps to school-age audiences. Ellen Jane has Down's syndrome and works for a veterinarian. Mark has cerebral palsy and performs from his puppet-sized wheelchair.

In the fall, one wing of East School will be occupied by students and staff from South Shore Educational Collaborative in Braintree which currently serves 33 physically and mentally handicapped students from 3 to 21. Thirteen of those students are in wheelchairs and all function at preschool levels despite their ages.

Collaborative students will be in a wing separate from regular students by the cafeteria. No mainstreaming is planned although the handicapped would use gym and playground facilities.

Annette Sherry, a member of the faculty special needs committee, said the school is "working in terms of all kinds of activities to develop an awareness of the handicapped condition." She said all of April would be devoted to that awareness.

Children's Museum kits called "What If I Couldn't" will be brought to the school by the PTO. The kits examine various handicaps.

The teacher group is also working on a slide-tape program with the collaborative which, Sherry said, would "point out that

## Hingham

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all children are basically the same despite some differences." The program will be presented to East School parents as well as children, she added.

During the last week in April, the teacher group, working with the town's Boy Scouts, hopes to set up a handicapped walk in the East School gym, so students can experience conditions under which the handicapped operate.

Clarke of Hingham and Cynthia Hurley of Cohasset gave similar awareness demonstrations during the puppet show. Students volunteered to stand in front of the class and try to unbutton their shirts with mittens on and without using their thumbs.

Others held paper against their foreheads and tried to write numbers. "This is exactly what it's like for Ellen Jane," Hurley commented. "She has to go slower. Think what it's like for Ellen Jane."

The puppets ask each other questions like "Can you ride a bike?," "Do you have medicine for seizures?" and "Are people mean to you?" But children viewing the performance always have more questions and are invited to ask them at the end of each skit.

The Junior League's presentation, called "Kids on the Block," is a national program geared to help implement the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The skits have been presented so far in Norwell, Marshfield, Duxbury and Hanover as well as Hingham.

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