

Handicapped man at mercy of welfare plan

By NICK GALLO
Of the Emerald

"I don't know who they expect to work for 42 cents an hour. Nobody's that crazy."

Andy Clement, a 24-year-old University graduate handicapped with muscular dystrophy, is angry at the Welfare Department.

The Welfare Department allows \$300 per month for Clement's live-in attendant through a program called Alternative Care. The program pays attendants in lieu of nursing homes. It aims to help handicapped people escape institutionalized roles by supporting them in the community.



Emerald Staff Photo

But the wages simply aren't enough, according to Clement. "I spent a month trying to find a replacement this winter. If my family wasn't here to help out, I'd have been lost," he says.

"Higher wages will attract more people. I'm a little at the mercy of hiring anyone who applies for the job," he notes. "I had an attendant one time rip me off for a month's payment and my food stamps."

Clement's present attendant is Craig Cruseau, who has been working on and off for a year. It is a 24-hour-a-day job—one that includes cooking, cleaning, giving medical assistance and being on call through the night.

Cruseau stresses that he works for Clement because he is his friend. He laughs when he says the money isn't much of an incentive to stay.

Why are wages so low? Paul Richmond, who is Clement's caseworker at the Welfare Department, admits it is a compromise.

"The \$300 amount is a flat rate. The cost would be

prohibitive if we paid by the hour," says Richmond. He adds that clients are given a \$573 a month allowance if they are in a nursing home.

Clement claims that the Welfare Department is saving money with the Alternative Care program. His benefits, including his attendant's wages, add up to \$452 a month. That's \$126 less than if he were in a nursing home.

Jim MacDonald, deputy ombudsman on Gov. Straub's staff, promises the matter is being given a full review.

"If this, in fact, is a 24-hour-a-day job, then the present wages are woefully inadequate, 'nick and dime' stuff," he says. "If a community cares, and I don't mean the mushy kind of caring, it should deal realistically with paying for these programs."

Clement, who has a college degree and is now job-hunting, can only agree. "Forty-two cents an hour just isn't enough."

ALERT tries to dispel myths

By SUSAN RYAN
Of the Emerald

How many misconceptions do you have about people in wheelchairs? Do you look the other way or cross the street when such a person approaches?

"Some of them talk funny. I suppose they're mentally a 'little off.'"

"I never smile at them because they might think I'm just pitying them."

ALERT is an organization trying to dispel such common myths. Director Loren Simonds says handicapped people face more than just architectural barriers on campus. While much has been done in the last few years to bring handicapped people out of hiding, misconceptions concerning the handicapped present a big problem for people trying to be active members of society.

"Our main purpose," says Simonds, "is to bring more

awareness of our problems to the public, to educate. We have a lack of transportation, housing and employment, but our biggest lack is that of social acceptance."

ALERT's efforts would take place through publicity, films on the handicapped, symposiums, lectures—but ALERT is facing a fundamental lack—money. Supported entirely by the ASUO, it was one of the most severely cut programs. Now affiliated with ESCAPE, the group needs many volunteers willing to gain credit hours by working.

"People are very naive about the handicapped," says Simonds. "Some think that because we're physically handicapped, we're also mentally, and that just because we may get around on wheels, we're still all human beings," he said.

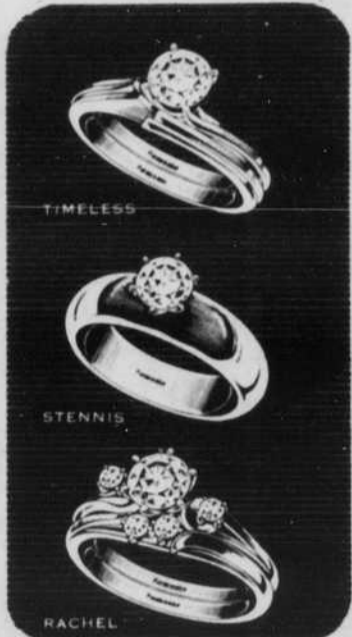
People wishing to volunteer and get credit hours may still sign up all this week by visiting the tables located in the breezeway between the old and new EMU, or by contacting the ALERT office, 686-4383.

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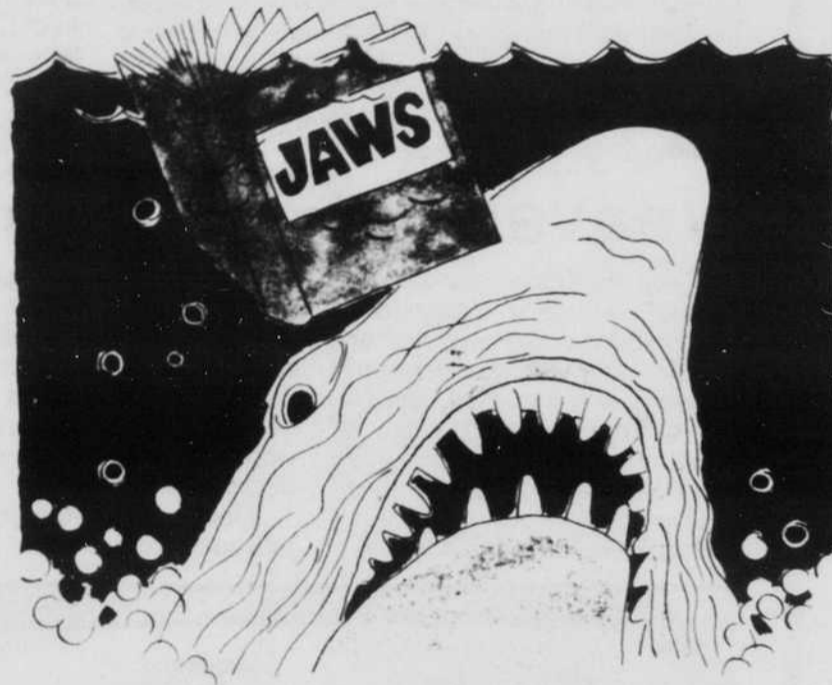
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