Mini event brings fun and games to developmental centre

When the Halton Development Centre held a mini special Olympics last week, all participants were winners.

By the time the Olympians had visited the 10 activity centres they were covered in buttons and red and blue ribbons. Although the limitations of the developmentally delayed children restricted events, organizers Wendy Ivy and Kim Brown devised 10 activity centres.

The 14 handicapped children at the centre, ranging in age from 5 to 18 years tossed bean bags, bowled, raced for balloons and hunted for a "wild boar" Thursday. The boar was really a watermelon made up like a pig and

events like a 50 yard dash took some improvisation but these adjustments did not hurt the pleasure factor.

"It was a fun day and a new activity for them to experience," said program supervisor Leslie Holwerda. Most of the children are confined to wheel-

chairs while others require assistance to walk. The condition of the centre's students means volunteers are heavily relied on by the eight staff members.

"We need enough volunteers so every child has someone," Ms. Holwerda explained.

Funded by the Ministry of Community and

Social Services (COMSOC), the centre offers a program aimed at increasing the developmental age of students.

Basic ambulatory and communication skills are built and children are taught to care for themselves. Some may learn to walk before entering adult programs and others may be taught a few words. Communication methods include sign language and the use of BLISS symobls designed for the mentally handicapped.

"We try to give them passive activity. There is a lot of watching but stimulation from a person talking to them is that much more than they can offer themselves," said the supervisor.

A waterbed, donated by a community.

group, walkers and bolsters are among the special aids the handicapped students need. Ms. Holwerda is unsure where this equipment and those who utilize it will be at this time next year when the new education Act comes into effect.

"As far as we know this place will close," she contends.

The Ministry of Education, under the Act, must provide for all students despite exceptionalities. According to Ms. Holweda there is a chance those identified as 'hard to serve" may remain in centres like the one in

The vacation season has depleted the number of students from 24, but the supervisor is expecting that number will be back

in September. Program participants are bused from all parts of the region to the centre which operates weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Despite concerns of higher pupil / teacher ratios when the handicapped are taken into the regular education system, Ms. Holwerda realizes the possible benefits of the change.

"The day they get into a school and are able to watch the other kids, it will help," she said.

The impending closure of the facility housed at E.C. Drury School for the Hearing Impaired will not interfere with meeting the needs of students there for at least the next



Eddie Clement gets some help from a volunteer who was at Halton Developmental Centre for a mini Special Olympics last week. (Photo by Jon Borgstrom)



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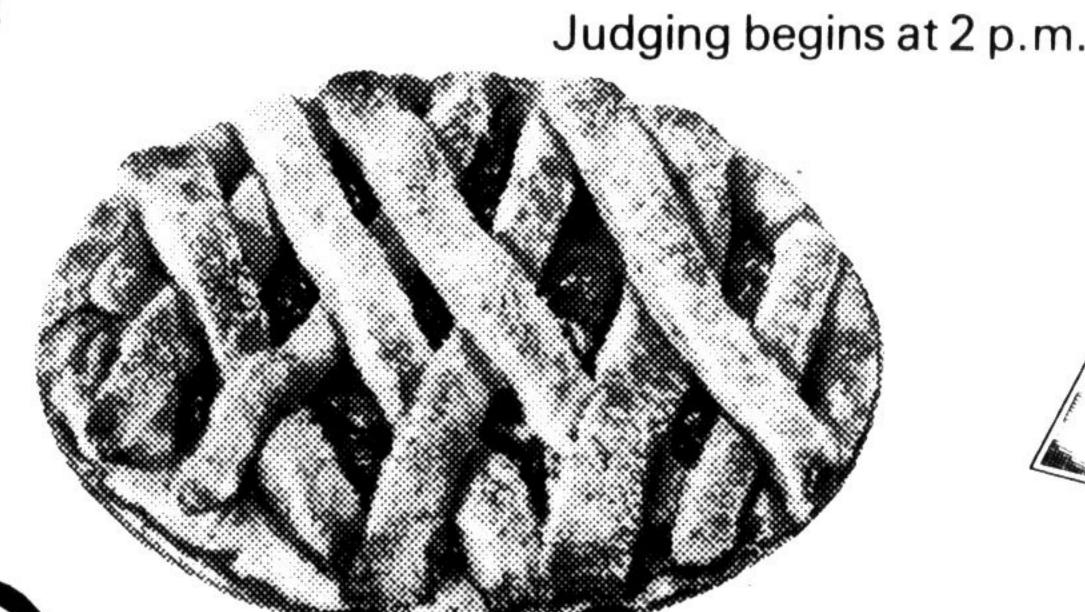


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