

Taking an interest in illiteracy

The Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre administration is taking an interest in teaching its



Not a teacher

Mary Norwood tells some of the regional hospital patients she teaches to read and count that she is a tutor or an instructor, not a teacher. Some of the men and women retain sad memories of their time in school. (Photo by Murray Moore.)

functionally illiterate patients to read and count.

Mary Norwood works 25 hours a week with 10 regional hospital patients at a time, usually on a one-to-one basis.

Being functionally illiterate means, "You want to go to a garage sale but you can't read where they are."

"We are not asking them to be Rhodes scholars or handing them Cyrano de Bergerac and asking them to read," Norwood said.

Helping people to function in the paper-driven world of the 1980s is the goal. The MHC administration has concluded that education is an important part of therapy. Educa-

tion is a part of the teaching of life skills.

Some of Norwood's pupils have been in an institution for so long that the education they had has been lost through lack of use. Others have learning disabilities or are developmentally delayed. The medication that some patients are taking can be another factor in their interest or progress.

A problem can be as simple as a person having a low opinion of himself. "I'm a dummy, you know. I'm the dummy," one patient said to Norwood by way of introduction.

To some patients Norwood has to explain that she isn't a teacher. "I don't like teachers," they'll

say to you," because of sad memories of schooling.

Success is defined as bringing a person to the Grade 6 reading level. The average person doesn't think that being able to read his name is remarkable. To the functionally illiterate person, being able to recognize his name, to sign his name, to tell the time or count from one to 10 is an achievement, Norwood said.

Norwood brought seven

years of experience as a tutor with the Midland Area Reading Council to the new position last March. She has contacted the Midland Area Reading Council and the other reading councils within the patient catchment area of the regional hospital. Patients leaving the hospital who could benefit from more help are referred to their local reading council.

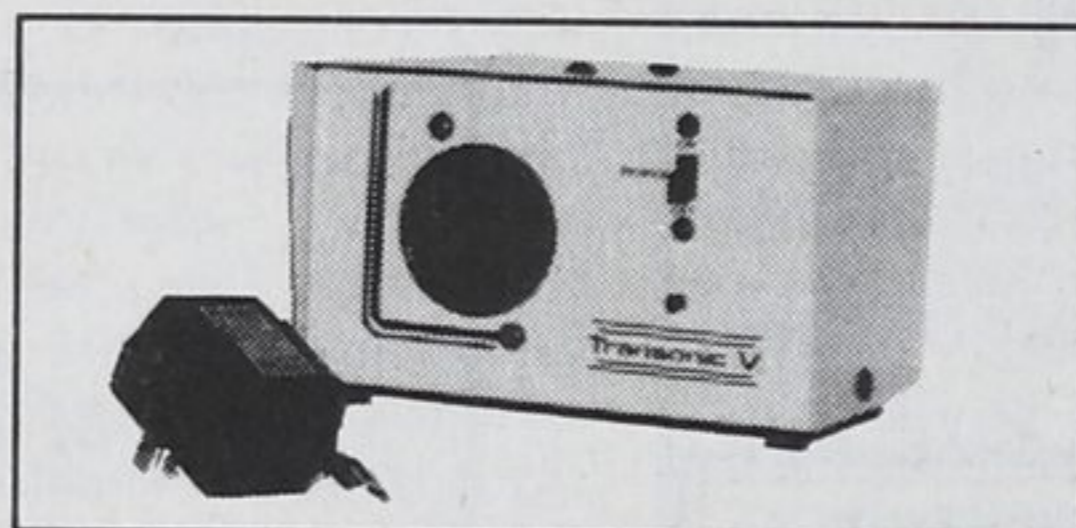
The standard of literacy keeps rising. At the turn of

the century, Norwood said, a person was literate if he could sign his name. In 1948 a person who could write a simple sentence was literate. In the 1980s the standard is a Grade 9 level.

Sept. 8 has been declared World Literacy Day. People who want to be connected with a reading tutor can contact the Midland Area Reading Council by telephoning 526-8808 or 526-9791.

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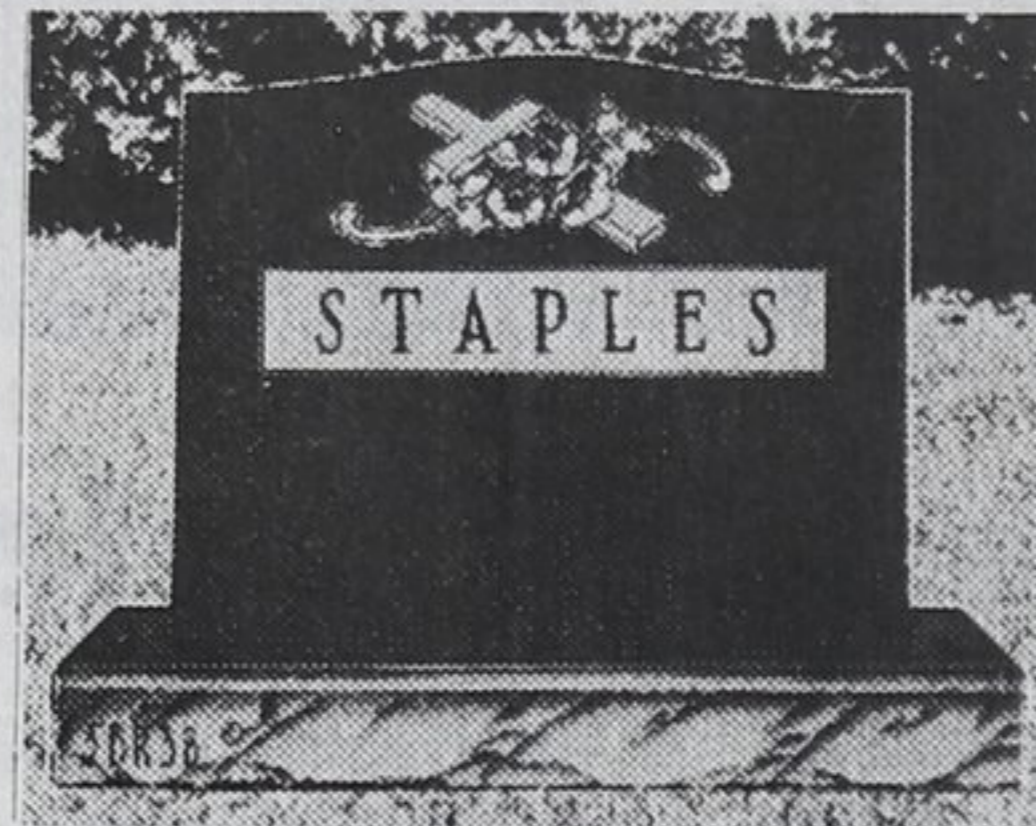
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