

SERVICE TO THE BLIND IN NORTH CAROLINA

By MADELINE P. McCrARY*

Talking Books records and machines, furnished by the Library of Congress, are available to any blind person in North Carolina through the State Commission for the Blind in Raleigh.

The North Carolina State Commission for the Blind is a single, unified state agency created by the General Assembly of 1935 through the concerted efforts of the North Carolina State Association for the Blind and the North Carolina Lions.

The law under which the Commission operates places on it the responsibility of interpreting, administering and supervising an all-inclusive program of work for the blind. These activities are accomplished by three main divisions of the Commission: First, the Social Service Division which supervises financial grants to the indigent blind and renders special services to all the blind of the state; second, the Medical Division which carries on three main phases of work, prevention of blindness, conservation of sight and restoration of vision; third, the Rehabilitation Division.

The Special Service Program as it functions in North Carolina is unique and is made possible by the funds that the North Carolina Lions and the North Carolina State Association for the Blind contribute. No other state has a program covering such a large area of activities for the blind. One of the special services available to any blind person who desires it is the distribution of Talking Book machines.

The Medical Division of the Commission offers good eye care to every blind or visual handicapped person who is unable to purchase such care for himself. Glasses are supplied for indigent blind people by the North Carolina Association for the Blind and the Lions of North Carolina.

The Rehabilitation Division is the third large service division of the Commission. It is comprised of five major units: General Rehabilitation Services, Rehabilitation Center for the Adult Blind (Butner, N. C.), Home Industries, Workshops and the Bureau of Employment for the Blind.

The General Rehabilitation Services Unit receives referrals for rehabilitation services, such as surgery, hospitalization, treatment for eyes or general physical restoration, training, glasses, occupational tools, equipment, which will lead to employment. North Carolina has led the nation for a number of years in placing blind persons in employment.

The North Carolina Rehabilitation Center for the Blind at Butner is primarily for orientation and adjustment to blindness. It was established by law in 1945 to meet the problems which confront a newly blinded adult; however, any blind person over sixteen years of age who is in need of adjustment and pre-vocational training leading to employment may attend the Center.

*Administrative Officer, State Commission for the Blind, Raleigh.

Recently a modern, newly-constructed building has been provided by the state and can adequately house sixty students. It has facilities for both white and Negro students. Many courses are taught including travel techniques, Braille, typing, simple arithmetic and English, workshop and many crafts. The student is enrolled in all courses and, with the aid of psychological and aptitude tests, his potential abilities are discovered. The average length of training at the Center is five and a half months, but a student can stay as long as eleven months if necessary. On completion of the courses offered at the Center, a student may be recommended for vocational training. This follow-up training is furnished to the student by the General Rehabilitation Service Program if the final goal is a job and permanent employment.

The Home Industry Unit furnishes training, supplies and equipment to those blind persons who because of age, health or family responsibilities cannot take work outside the home. The Home Industry Counselors work with and supervise the homebound blind. After blind persons have been taught how to make certain articles such as rugs, mats, baskets and other craft work, the Counselors buy salable products to be sold over the state. The North Carolina State Association for the Blind has set up a revolving fund which makes it possible for the Counselors to buy articles and pay the blind person immediately.

There are five Workshops for the Blind in North Carolina jointly sponsored by the Lions Club and other civic organizations, and supervised by the North Carolina State Commission for the Blind. The shops are located in Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Asheville and Charlotte. All pay the operators on a piecework basis. At the present time the Workshops are working on Federal Defense orders and are running full capacity. Mattresses, pillow cases, bags, mats, brooms and other articles are manufactured by these shops. The largest and probably best known shop is the Guilford Industries for the Blind in Greensboro. This shop makes brooms, mops, and link-rubber doormats. The Lions Clubs sell some of these blind-made articles, keep a part of the proceeds to use on work for the blind and return a part of the proceeds to the shop.

The Bureau of Employment is another part of vocational rehabilitation services. The Bureau offers training in stand operation and employment in one of the supervised stands if the client successfully completes the training. The stands are located primarily in post offices and other federal buildings, court houses, public buildings, private buildings and industrial plants. Operators are paid weekly salaries, have paid sick leave and vacation time, are covered by free hospitalization, and the Bureau has made it possible for the blind to obtain life insurance under a group plan.

For further information or services for the blind, contact the North Carolina State Commission for the Blind, Raleigh, N. C., or one of the six district offices. These offices are located in Asheville, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Greenville, and Wilmington.

Needed—An Indexer!

This issue was to have carried an index to Volume 14, but the editor has been unable to locate an indexer. We hope that a volunteer will read this plea and respond. Somewhere there must be a member of NCLA who will contribute some time to the Association and take on this needed service. Why not you?