

each client, the staff assigns each individual five goals to work on pertinent to his problem areas.

Eight house managers help the residents work on their targeted areas. Each house manager is responsible for several goals. For instance, House Manager Lisa Ogerro teaches meal preparation skills to two of the clients and kitchen maintenance to another.

"In meal preparation the goal is that they can plan the meal, get all the stuff together that they need to make it, prepare it correctly and serve it all without any assistance from me or any of the other house managers," Ogerro says. "Because there's not going to be anyone watching them when they finally get out."

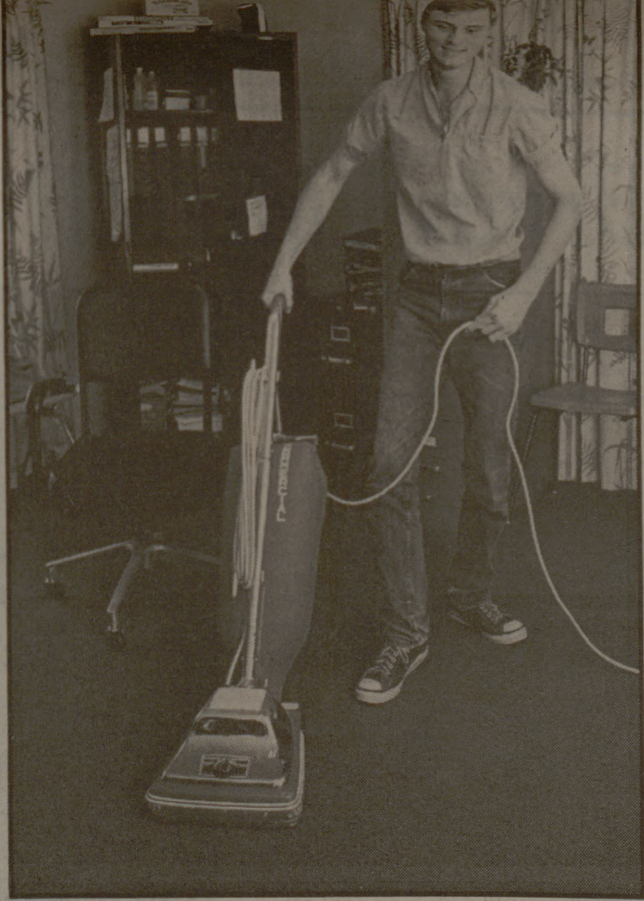
The senior psychology major has been working at Family Tree since January. Before that Ogerro worked at Mary Lake, a Bryan MHMR facility for emotionally disturbed men and women. Ogerro started out at Mary Lake through a work-in-the-field program at Texas A&M. Eventually, she wants to work with autistic children.

Gisela Dellmeier is another house manager who has been working at Family Tree since January. She is responsible for teaching independent travel. This covers, for example, when to cross the street, where the crosswalks are — in other words walking and traveling independently. She says the clients enter at all different levels — "no two are alike."

"A lot of the guys here are already at the stage where they can take a bus alone," Dellmeier says. "They know where to go, they know how to read a schedule and they know how to buy a ticket."

She got involved with the facility because of her interest in therapeutic horseback riding. A friend of hers works at Family Tree and the two of them want to start a riding program for the clients.

But Dellmeier and her friend have



been unable to start a program because this area lacks the facilities. They have taken the clients riding on private horses on privately owned land and the men loved it, Dellmeier says.

"It would be wonderful if we had land where we could have modern, safe facilities," she says. "I wish someone would donate us the land. If we had the land we could scrounge up the labor to put a fence up and all that."

Dellmeier, an animal science major specializing in behavior modification, says her major has helped prepare her for her job.

"Behavior modification is the same — it doesn't matter which species you're dealing with," she says. "If you're going to teach something you're going to use the same kind of learning techniques and behavior

modification.

"I'm used to dealing with animals of a completely different species. Species which definitely perceive differently than I do and which definitely learn in a different way than I do."

"So maybe, to me, these guys aren't as different as they might be to someone else."

Dellmeier and Ogerro say Family Tree has both its positive and negative points.

"No system's ever perfect and I've seen a lot of things that could be improved," Ogerro says. "It's not a bad place really, it's just that every place could use some improvement."

They both agree that Family Tree needs more room.

"I personally would like to see them have a place where they had a little bit more land — where they

could play or have a garden," Dellmeier says. "It would be really nice if they could have a place in the country."

Ogerro thinks the best aspects of Family Tree are that such a facility even exists and that the clients are not held back in any way.

"They're all learning the skills they're going to need to go on their own," she says. "I think getting out on their own is healing to them in a way — it's good for them."

Dellmeier likes the optimistic atmosphere at the house.

"One of the things I like best about this place," Dellmeier says, "is that I can't really think of anytime that I've worked at a place where everyone, all the employees, were so sincere about what they're doing and so consistently enthusiastic about their job."

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costs less to deliver the service and it does more good," he says.

To take care of someone in a state hospital costs about \$100 per day per person. A residential facility costs less than half that. In addition to community centers saving money, Page says people are happier closer to their friends and family.

MHMR offers other services in addition to Family Tree. The Authority's brochure advertises that its programs can help a person effectively handle such problems as a new job or retirement, divorce, remarriage, family problems, birth of a child, death of a loved one, alcohol or drug dependency, fears and anxieties, the behavior problems of children, the stormy emotions of adolescence, and worries about one's own value to others.

Other services can help developmentally delayed children achieve skills permitting them to attend public schools and can assist mentally retarded individuals in the

learning of daily living skills.

Mental health programs offered by MHMR are: screening and emergency services, outpatient services, inpatient services, aftercare services, medication clinic services, mental health residential services, drug dependence services, alcohol counseling services, aging services and social development services.

The mental retardation programs offered are: diagnosis and evaluation, outpatient services, residential services and vocational training centers.

Family resource services are also available which help parents with children with mild to severe disabilities and provide genetic screening and counseling.

All these programs add up to total budget of about \$2 million. Family Tree costs about \$100,000 per year to operate. The Department of Health and Human Services funds Family Tree through an Intermediate Care Facility program. These facilities serve people who have a diagnosis of mental retardation.

Family Tree gets referrals from two major sources: state schools and community centers across the state.

"The decision to take that person into the facility and the decision to discharge that person is a team decision," Page says. "The team is made up of direct care staff who work at the facility."

"They come in — we look at their needs, we develop a program for those needs and then, when the team feels comfortable with discharging that person, we discharge them."

"And you've got to realize that this is a heavy responsibility — you're placing someone out into independent living — it's like a kid leaving home."

Family Tree is a training program for the residents, a facility social worker says.

"We train people to do household chores — to cook, to clean, to do the things they would need to do if they lived in apartments, or wherever," Sandy Thomas says.

Once a resident is discharged, a

case manager (the person who does the follow-up) helps the resident find housing, employment and social activities.

"For instance, if they expressed a religious preference, they would be introduced to a local minister," Page says.

How successful the program is depends on your definition of success, Thomas says. Though the program takes time, none of the men placed so far have returned.

"Folks are usually here for about two years," she says. "Last year, there were five folks that were placed in apartments from the Family Tree. So about half of the people that we had here two years ago are now living independently."

"One of the five is competitively employed by the city of Bryan, two continue to work through the sheltered workshop (another MHMR program) and the other two are living on their social security benefits."

"And I think that's a pretty significant number that have been placed and are doing real well."