

# Work

## Possibilities and Training

## CHAPTER 54

For most people, some kind of work is necessary in order to eat and have a place to live. In rural areas, the main work of many families involves farming, fishing, hunting and gathering, or other forms of food production. Equally important is the work of “keeping house” and bringing up the family.

Who does most of the work within a family depends on local customs and the family’s situation. In most poor rural families nearly everyone—women, men, and children—help with the work of survival. By the time they are 5 or 6 years old, children may be helping to take care of the babies, feed the chickens, herd the goats, shell and clean the grain, and to carry out other tasks so that the older members of the family are free to do other work. In many societies, children by age 8 or 10 bring in more income (food or money) than it costs their families to take care of them.

### Work that frees people and work that oppresses them

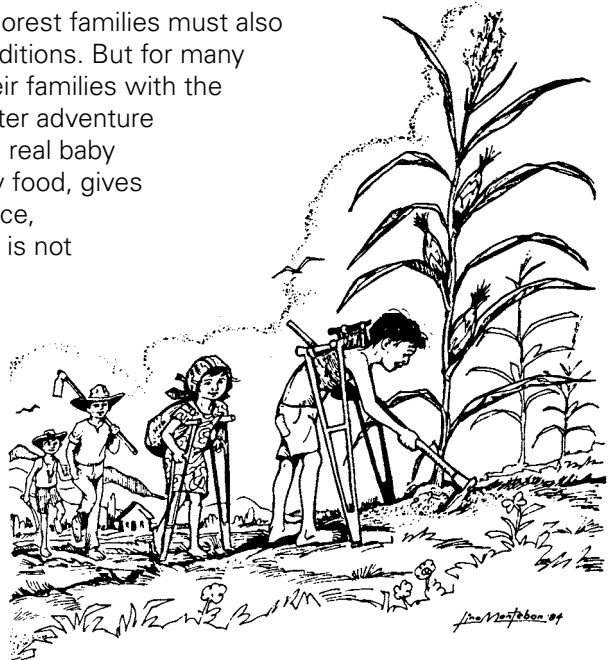


Work—whether it is done by adults or children—can be either a good or bad experience. It can help persons gain dignity and independence. Or it can take away their dignity, freedom, and health. How workers are affected depends on work conditions, on the fairness of wages, on workers’ rights, and on how much respect and equality exists between workers and bosses.

In some situations, especially in cities, many children are forced to work long, hard hours in unsafe or unhealthy work conditions for very low pay. Such child labor is cruel, and may result in permanent injury to the child’s body and spirit.

In some rural areas, children from the poorest families must also work long, hard hours under difficult conditions. But for many rural children, the opportunity to help their families with the labor of production and survival is a greater adventure than is play. The chance to take care of a real baby (not just a doll) or to help grow the family food, gives many farm children a feeling of importance, self-confidence, and personal worth that is not often seen in city children.

As a child grows up, to be wanted and well cared for is not enough. A young person needs to feel that they are needed. To become independent can be important. But just as important is to develop an ability to do things for and with others, to contribute toward meeting the needs of family, friends, and community.



Too often children with disabilities are not given the opportunity to become helpful or needed, or to learn the skills to contribute in an important way to their family and community. The family and community need to look ahead to the child's future. They need to find ways to build on whatever strengths she has, so that she can have a full and meaningful role in the community.

## A money-earning job is not the only meaningful role in society

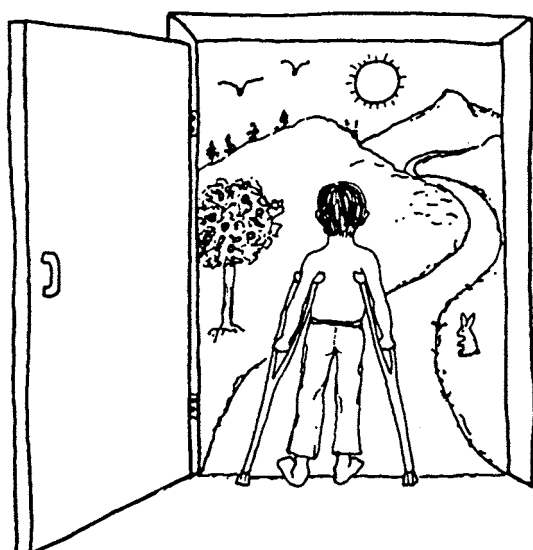
In some cultures, especially in Europe and the United States, great importance is placed on work to earn money. Often it seems that a person's worth is measured by how much money they make. Where such a value system exists, a standard goal of rehabilitation is to prepare people with disabilities to work at some kind of money-earning job.

But **caution!** This goal of a paid job may not be appropriate in some parts of the world. Traditions and local values differ from place to place. Some societies are more accepting of persons who do not earn or produce, as long as they contribute and take part in other ways.

Also, we must remember that in poor countries the unemployment rate (people without work) is often very high, even for people without disabilities. It may be very difficult for a person with disabilities to get a job, even if well-trained.

There are many ways, other than by working for money, that people with disabilities can contribute to their family and community. They may be able to learn skills to help with daily activities in the home. Or they may become leaders for community action. As we discussed in Chapter 45, villagers with disabilities who are unable to do hard physical farm work, often make outstanding health workers (paid or volunteer), rehabilitation workers, popular organizers, or defenders of human rights.

It is important that rehabilitation programs have a broad view of how people with disabilities might work or fit into the community. Too often skills training prepares a person with physical disabilities to do jobs that a person without disabilities could do just as well. The challenge, whenever possible, should be to build on the unique strengths, experience, and qualities of the person with disabilities: help her to find a role in society that she can do better than most people without disabilities. Disability does make a person different in certain ways, for better and for worse. Rather than pretending that the difference does not exist, it is wiser to accept the differences and look for ways that having disabilities helps to deepen or strengthen the person. Help the person to have not just an ordinary role in society, but one that is in some ways outstanding. Persons like Helen Keller (a woman with complete loss of vision and hearing who became a social leader and agent for change) can be our role models.



Rehabilitation programs and families should avoid planning a child's (or adult's) life work, or role in the community, for him. Rather, we should help make available as wide a range of opportunities as possible.

**Our goal should always be to open doors  
for the child, not to close them.**

## FOCUS ON AND DEVELOP A CHILD'S STRENGTHS

Children with disabilities also have areas of strength. It is important to help children discover and develop their strengths so that they can live full, happy lives. For example:

<p>A child with cognitive delay and typical physical development...</p>	<p>... may find it easier to learn certain physical skills ...</p>	<p>... than to learn mental skills.</p>	<p>He may be happier as a farm worker than a writer or bookkeeper.</p>
<p>A child with physical disabilities and typical cognitive development...</p>	<p>... may find it easier to learn mental skills...</p>	<p>... than to learn physical skills.</p>	<p>She may be happier as a health worker or school teacher than a farmer or grain grinder.</p>
<p>A child with disabilities affecting his legs...</p>	<p>... may find it easier to learn manual skills ...</p>	<p>... than to learn skills that require use of his legs and feet.</p>	<p>He may be happier as a sandal maker or welder than a field worker.</p>
<p>A child with loss of vision...</p>	<p>... may find it easier to learn skills that depend mainly on hearing and touch ...</p>	<p>... than to learn jobs that are much more difficult without eyesight.</p>	<p>He may be happier as a village musician than a goat herder or hunter.</p>

**CAUTION:** It usually makes sense to help children develop specialized work skills in the areas where they are strongest. But it is also important for them to develop self-care and daily living skills as best they can, even though this may be difficult. A child with cognitive delay needs to learn basic communication skills. A child with spasticity needs to learn, if possible, how to prepare food and keep house. A child with paralysis or vision loss needs to learn how to get from place to place.

## LEARNING SKILLS FOR AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

### Development of the mind

Learning skills that require more mental than physical activity can help children with physical disabilities to gain a place in the community.

For development of skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, when possible, it is usually best that children with disabilities go to school. Ideas for helping a child get to school and be accepted there are discussed in chapters 47 and 53. If a child cannot go to school, figure out ways for her to be taught at home—perhaps by schoolchildren.

As soon as the child learns to read and write, try to buy or borrow simple, interesting, and educational books. With these the child can develop her mind further.

Starting a village library is often an excellent idea. In fact, a young person with disabilities may be able to become the village librarian—and a non-formal educator.



In Melkote, India, the Janapada Seva Trust teaches village children with disabilities many productive skills. Here, a boy without hands uses his foot to draw greeting cards, which are later sold.

To open up other possibilities, help your village recognize both the needs and value of people with disabilities and other disadvantaged persons (such as single mothers). When deciding who to choose for public service jobs and community responsibilities, try to make it a village policy to consider choosing persons who have disabilities.

Although they may be unable to do hard physical farm work, people with disabilities can often make outstanding health workers, cooperative administrators, shop keepers, librarians, “cultural promoters,” or child care center coordinators—if they are given the chance.



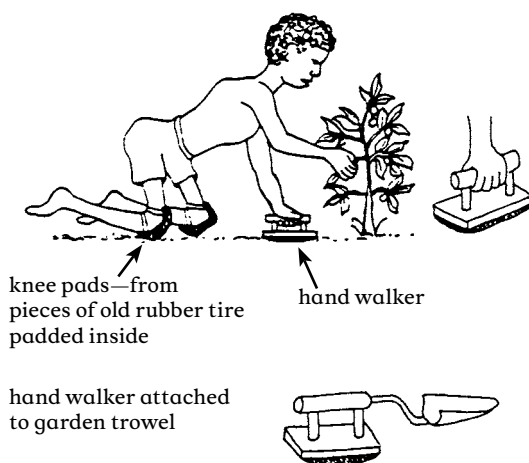
In a village, a young person who learns to read and write can become a librarian and sharer of information.

## Adaptations for farm work and gardening

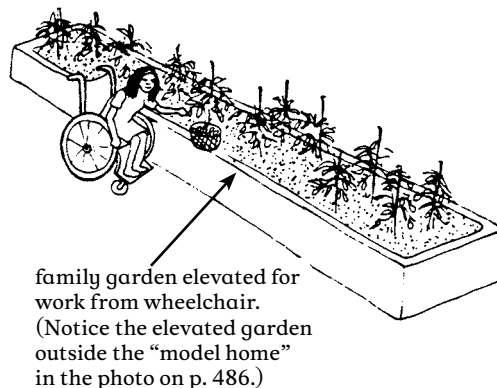
Persons with weakness in their lower bodies and who have strong arms and hands can learn a wide variety of work skills where they can sit and use their hands. (See list of skills on p. 509.) However, for many villagers, the growing of food is central to their lives.

If certain adaptations are made, villagers with disabilities can often help with farming and gardening. Here are a few suggestions.

### AIDS FOR CRAWLING

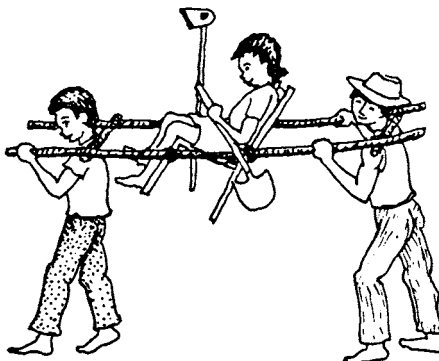


### ELEVATED GARDENS



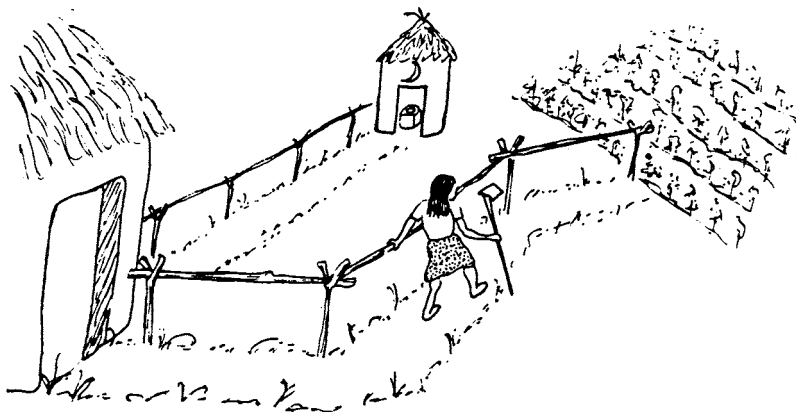
### OFF-ROAD TRANSPORT

Getting to distant fields over rough trails may be difficult for the young person who cannot walk. A simple carrying frame can be used to carry the child and also the tools and grain.



### GUIDELINES OR RAILS

For the child with vision loss or who has difficulty with balance, hand rails may make it easier to get from the house to the garden, the latrine, and the well or water hole.



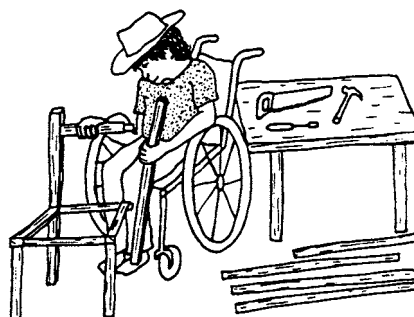
## Alternatives to farm work

Many villagers with disabilities will need to learn skills other than farm work. If unemployment is high it may not be wise to train people with disabilities for jobs where there is a lot of competition. In fact, any sort of paid job may be hard to get. Therefore, it often makes more sense to teach young people with disabilities skills so that they can become self-employed. Or perhaps several people with and without disabilities can become partners in a small home industry.

A village-based rehabilitation center with a shop can teach young people with disabilities different manual skills such as leatherwork, clothes making, woodworking or welding. While they are with the program, they can use these skills to make a wide range of rehabilitation and orthopedic equipment. They can also make toys, chairs, leather goods, clothes, and other objects for sale. The income from the sale of these things can help cover some of the costs of the rehabilitation program and training. When the learners have gained enough skills, perhaps the community program can help them set up their own small shop in their home, village, or neighborhood.

In several countries, organizations that serve people with disabilities have started revolving loan plans that provide a craftspeople with the basic equipment to start their own small business. The loans are paid back little by little over a reasonable time, so that the same money can be used to help another person with disabilities get started.

### SELF-EMPLOYMENT—A WISE APPROACH WHERE JOBS ARE HARD TO GET



Helping people with disabilities become craftspeople and set up their own small business in their home is a good option to generate income.



Trash collection—a job nobody likes but everyone must help do. (PROJIMO)

In the West Indies, the Caribbean Council for the Blind provides a guarantee to local banks which give start-up loans to people with disabilities. So far, 97 percent of the people who have received loans have met their payments on time. This is the bank's best repayment rate! It helps convince bankers not only that people with disabilities can run their own small businesses responsibly, but that they are a good investment. By involving local banks in the loan program, the public is being educated toward a new respect and appreciation for people with disabilities.



Villagers with disabilities can become skilled in a wide variety of manual skills. Here we list some skills that are taught in different rehabilitation programs, training programs, and workshops.

- \* skills marked with a star are sometimes taught to people with loss of vision
- skills marked with a box are sometimes taught to people with cognitive delay

leatherwork □

sandal and shoe making and repair metal work of a wide variety

welding

radio and television repair

electrical and mechanical repairs weaving  
of cloth, blankets, etc.\*

sewing and clothes making □

toymaking \*

basketweaving \* □

dollmaking □

carpentry \* □

cabinet and furniture making \*

hospital equipment making

making rehabilitation equipment and aids

wheelchair making

prosthetic limb making

drawing, painting, sculpture and design,

wood or ivory carving

production of simple marketplace gadgets, cages,  
utensils and knicknacks (see p. 510)

designing and making greeting cards

printing and silk-screening

pottery making \*

broom making \* □

chalk making \* □

candle making \*

artificial flower making □

typing and secretarial skills

bookkeeping, accounting

bee keeping

knife, scissor, and saw sharpening □

gardening and vegetable raising \* □

animal raising (chickens, ducks, goats, rabbits,  
pigs, fish) \* □

managing a small store or street shop \*

cooking and restaurant management

health work

jewelry making

rope and string making \* □

landscaping, grounds maintenance □

janitorial service (cleaning and maintenance) □

fish net making and repair \*

teaching \*

playing music \*

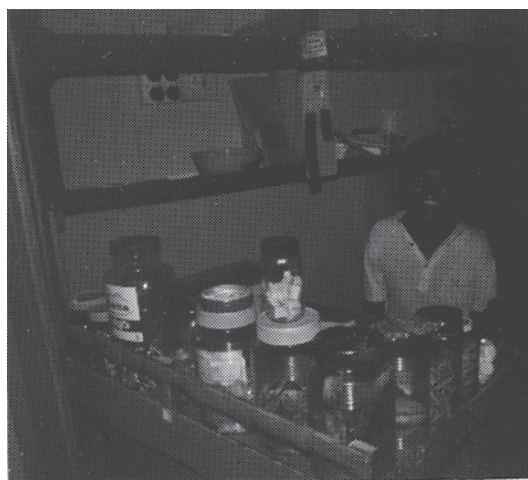
laundry work, pressing

hair cutting, dressing

dental work



A boy with vision loss in the Philippines plants a vegetable garden. (Photo by Robert Jaekle for Helen Keller International)



This young villager in Sri Lanka became quadriplegic at age 14. The Sarvodaya CBR program helped him set up this small store in front of his home.

The above list includes only a few of the activities that people with disabilities have learned in order to run their own small business or set up shop in their home. As much as is possible, it should be up to a person with disabilities to decide what skill or skills she wants to learn. Choices that are possible will depend on the person's combination of abilities and interest as well as on the local situation, resources, market, training opportunities, and other local factors.

Making craft goods out of old junk—an experiment in Pakistan

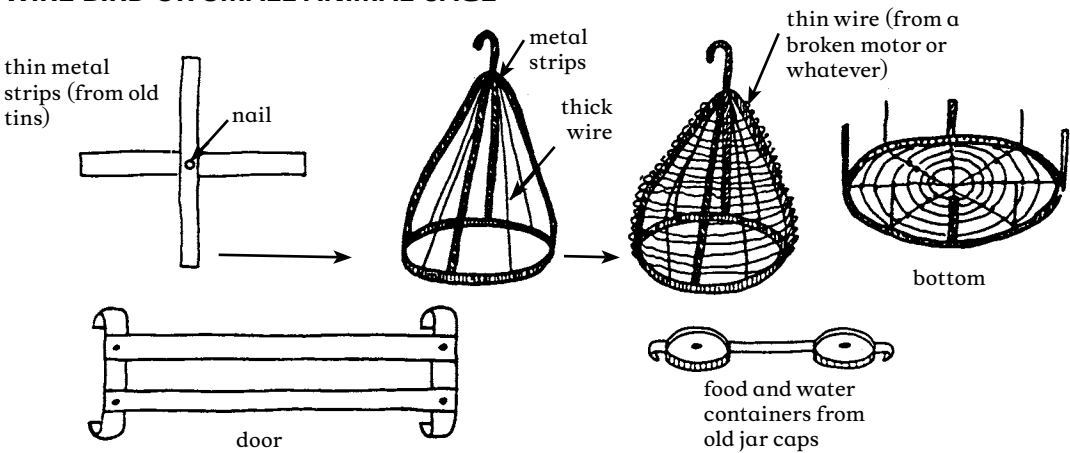
Leaders in the Community Rehabilitation Development Project (see p. 520) in Peshawar, Pakistan realize that in their country it is very difficult for people with disabilities to earn a living. Most either live by begging, are cared for by their families, or die of neglect. Since chances of employment are so limited, it is more realistic to help people with disabilities learn simple craft skills for self-employment at home (if they have a home) or in the marketplace. They can make small things at low cost and sell them in the marketplace. If their small business helps the family a little or covers part of their daily expenses, something has been gained.

In the marketplace of Peshawar there is a variety of clever, simply made cages, tools, utensils, toys and other objects, mostly made out of very low-cost or waste materials. The Project has hired a self-taught craftsperson to collect, study, and make design plans for some of these marketplace things, so that people with disabilities can learn to make and sell them. To follow are a few examples. For more complete instructions, write to Mental Health Centre, Mission Hospital, Peshawar, N.W.F.P., Pakistan.

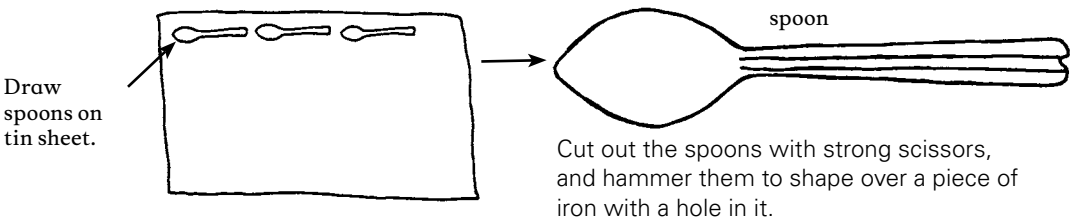
Marketplace crafts for self-employed production by people with disabilities

These examples and the examples on the next page are from FAMN/UNICEF Community Rehabilitation Development Project, Peshawar, Pakistan.

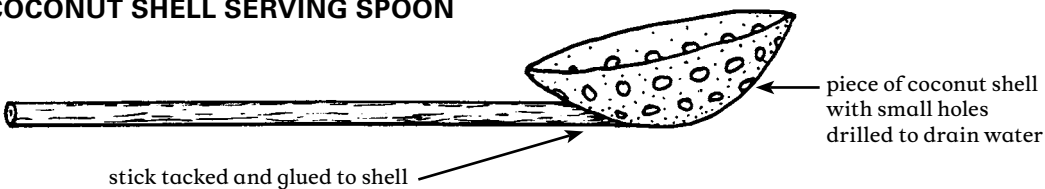
WIRE BIRD OR SMALL ANIMAL CAGE



TIN SPOONS

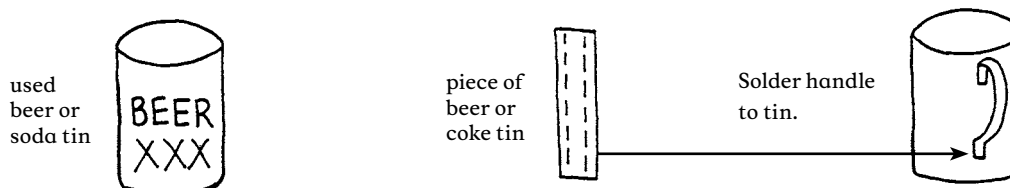


COCONUT SHELL SERVING SPOON

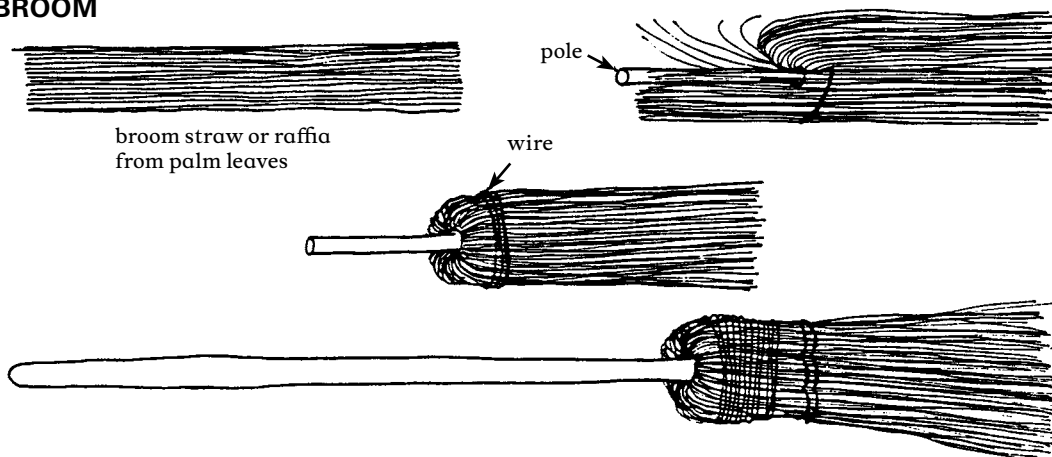




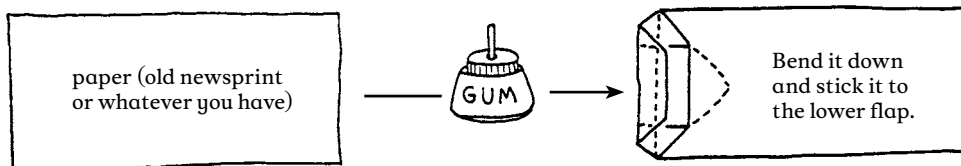
## TIN CUPS



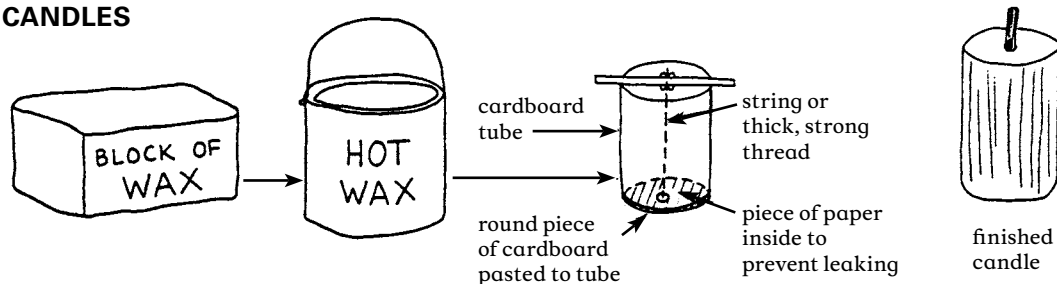
## BROOM



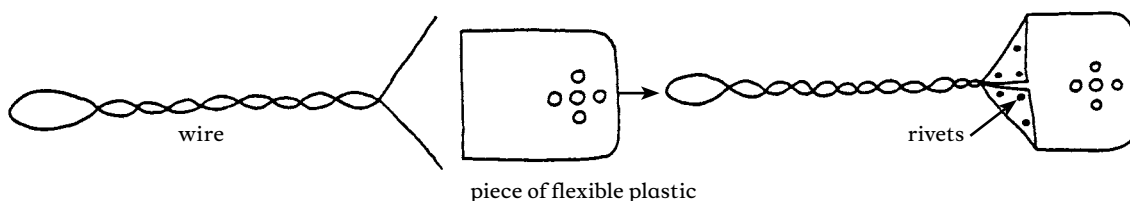
## PAPER BAGS



## CANDLES



## FLY SWATTER



## TRAINING

### The integrated approach

When possible, it is usually best that skills training for people with disabilities take place together with skills training for people without disabilities. For example:

- A child with disabilities can go to the river to learn to wash clothes with other children and adults.
- A child with disabilities can go to the fields to help plant, weed, and harvest alongside his family.
- A child with disabilities can go to the same school as other children, and then go on to some specialized training course.
- A young person with disabilities may enter a shop or production team as an apprentice just as young people without disabilities often do.

For a child with mild to moderate disabilities, there are many possibilities to prepare for life's work together with other children—especially if parents encourage the child and explore opportunities. A community rehabilitation program can help by encouraging schoolteachers, schoolchildren, training program instructors, craftspeople, and possible employers to be more open to giving young people with disabilities an equal chance.

For young people with more severe disabilities, opportunities for integrated education or skills training will be much more limited. Alternatives need to be looked for, or arranged, especially in communities that are still not open to giving them an equal chance.

### Special training possibilities

Different approaches have been tried to help people with disabilities learn specific skills. In cities, training centers are sometimes set up for children with similar disabilities. These include programs for children with hearing or vision loss and centers for young people with cognitive delay. Each program chooses skills and activities suited to the particular limitations and abilities of the group. For example, a skills training and production program for people with vision loss may focus on skills that depend largely on touch, such as weaving or chalk making.

In smaller villages, it is often not possible to bring together enough persons with the same kind of disability to create a specialized training program just for them. However, a community rehabilitation program can, in its workshop, include a variety of skills training opportunities which can be adapted to persons with a wide range of disabilities.



This young man in Niger, Africa, learned to make leather goods together with other young people with disabilities. Later he can work out of his own home and sell his goods in the marketplace. (Photo: Carolyn Watson)

## Sheltered workshops — yes or no?

Sheltered workshops are training and production centers specifically for people with disabilities. The idea is to provide a work opportunity and a little pay to those who would find it difficult to get training and employment in other places.

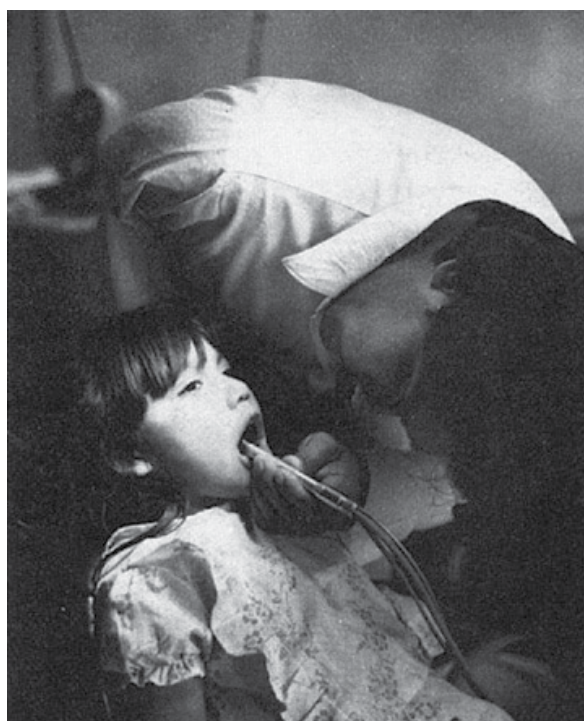
At best, these workshops can be a very valuable experience for participants, and may serve as a step toward greater independence. They help participants gain the technical and social skills, work habits, responsibility, and self-confidence needed for outside employment or self-employment.

At worst, sheltered workshops can (and often do) actually hold back the development and crush the spirit of participants. Too often they are run by persons who treat the workers like babies or slaves, giving them simple, repetitive tasks. The workers are not involved in the planning, organization, or running of the program. They are simply told what to do. They become increasingly dependent on the center and fearful of their inability to make it on their own in the outside world.

Perhaps the key difference between these two kinds of sheltered workshops is the question of control and equality. If the participants are involved in the direction and decision making of their own program, then they will grow and mature along with the program. Perhaps they will make more “mistakes” than a program that is controlled and run by “superiors.” But they will learn from those mistakes. At the same time they learn crafts, they learn skills in decision-making, problem-solving and small-group democracy—essential skills for improving life in the “real world.”

A community-based rehabilitation program run by people with disabilities may have some features of a sheltered workshop. It may provide special training and work opportunities adjusted to the pace, abilities, and limitations of each participant. It may provide such an enjoyable home and family setting that some persons may choose to keep working rather than to move on into the “outside world.” But because it is a program run by people with disabilities, and major decisions are made at all-group meetings, it tends to be a dignifying and liberating experience.

A program where people with and without disabilities work side by side, sharing equally in decisions and responsibility, may be even more liberating.



A young person with one arm who works as a village dental worker in Project Piaxtla drills a tooth before filling it. (Mexico)



Children with paralysis in their bodies often develop strong arms and hands—and can do many kinds of work.



Here 2 boys who had polio build cane blinds for the model home at PROJIMO.



This boy with paraplegia from tuberculosis spokes a wheel for a wheelchair. He rides a wheeled lying board because of pressure sores on his butt.

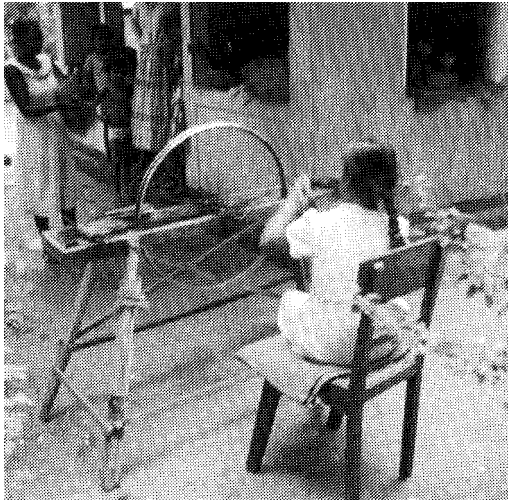
Combining work with therapy

Whenever possible, look for work that will help a person with disabilities fit into the life of their community, and that will also provide needed exercise or therapy. Here is one example from the Sarvodaya community-based rehabilitation program in Beruwala, Sri Lanka.

With the help of her family and a village rehabilitation volunteer, this girl with cerebral palsy learned to make rope from coconut fiber (jute). This is a common village craft, so she can work with other villagers.



Separating and preparing the fibers is good therapy for the spasticity in her hands.



Twisting the fiber with this wheel to make rope helps her move her stiff arms in a smooth circle—providing excellent, active therapy while she works.