

Foster Homes Needed Here for Handicapped Rural Children

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The foster care program for handicapped children is now lining up homes, mostly in Fairbanks, for handicapped children from rural Alaska who need special training.

Most of the children under the program have already been placed for next year, but a few are still without "homes," according to Mrs. Jean Beyrer, Bureau of Indian Affairs child welfare worker for the Fairbanks

district.

The BIA sponsors the program, under which handicapped children leave their homes in rural Alaska to live with foster parents for nine months in a city where they can obtain the special education they need.

For this service, foster parents are paid \$174 per month for a child 13 years of age or older and \$121 per month for a child 12 years old or younger.

Last year the program placed about 45 children and this year

expects to place about 55, Mrs. Beyrer said.

The placement list is complete, she added, except for several teenage boys still needing foster homes.

Members of this group, she continued, are usually the hardest to place and often have the most difficulty adjusting to a new home. They are at an age where they need the supervision of adults but may find it hard to accept such supervision from

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urban foster parents after having lived in a village for 16 or 17 years, she explained.

Ideally, Mrs. Beyrer said, the boys should be placed in a group-home possibly run by a native couple. In a home, with about 10 boys, the teenagers could receive group therapy with the help of a counselor and assistance from their peers.

Often the teenagers code of behavior is set by his peer group rather than by adults, and he tends to respond to his peers better than to foster parents, Mrs. Beyrer said.

Some of those in the program are slightly retarded or are slow learners. Some have a hear-

ing problem. Others need psychiatric help and counseling—none of which is available regularly in the village.

Most of the children are at least nine years old, Mrs. Beyrer explained.

A handicapped child of any age is eligible as long as he is still in school. If not by parents, referrals are made by teachers, public health nurses, or welfare workers in the bush.

Foster parents are screened and interviewed and both foster parents and children are counseled in an effort to make the adjustment as smooth as possible.