

When the Orphans Saw 'Annie'

WHEN Janet Angier decided to stage her first musical, "Annie" was the inevitable choice. Having been orphaned as an infant, and placed in a series of foster homes before being adopted, she felt a unique kind of identification with the show.

Despite marriage and motherhood, acclaim as a musician and success as the founder of a school called Music in Chappaqua, Ms. Angier says she still has to remind herself that — orphaned or not — she belongs on the planet as much as anyone.

As an avowal of her past and an acknowledgment of the many young lives being lived in foster care, Ms. Angier welcomed a group of special guests to the school's production of "Annie" at the Seven Bridges Middle School in Chappaqua last weekend. She had donated 170 tickets to Abbott House, a social services agency in Irvington that arranges foster care and high-risk adoptions for children from New York City and the Hudson Valley.

"We gave the tickets mostly to foster children and their foster parents," said

cially outfitted oven.

"These are skills that visually impaired children need to learn in order to become independent," said Josephine DeFini, Lighthouse vice president for the Hudson Valley region.

Dr. DeFini should know. She, too, is blind. On a recent Saturday, she rattled off a list of essential skills — how to groom oneself, tie one's shoes, slice an apple, make a sandwich — that blind children are often kept from learning by overly helpful adults. And she explained that she had instituted a program to teach those skills, only to have to halt it for lack of money.

"Blindness, which is an old thing, is not as exciting anymore and doesn't always get donations," Dr. DeFini said, explaining that funding has remained level over the years while costs have risen. "It's not a hot topic like AIDS or cancer, or things that get more money."

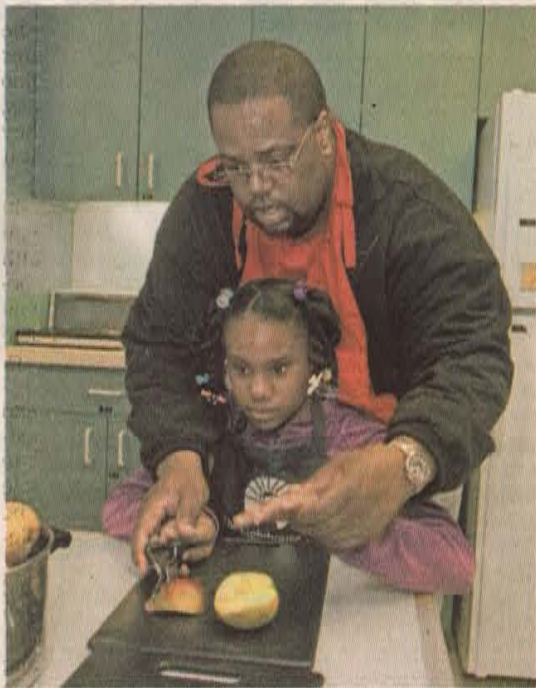
One reason that adults tend to be oversolicitous, she said, is that they don't have much experience with the blind. Advances in prenatal care have reduced the number

of visually impaired children. Indeed, most of the 15 children in the Lighthouse's Saturday program are the only blind or visually impaired students at their schools. In such instances it is perhaps unsurprising that teachers rush to help their charges.

Last September, Dr. DeFini's group began offering sessions twice a month to teach just these kinds of skills. In contrast to the therapeutic recreation program that the agency had been offering for a few years, the class focused on developing abilities that the sighted take for granted.

The program was successful — but it got canceled anyway. It was expensive, requiring a large staff. So the therapeutic recreation program was reinstated in its place.

Still, the staff does what it can to weave skill-building into the recreation class. On a recent Saturday, Amanie, who is in sixth grade at the Montessori 27 school in Yonkers, learned to make applesauce. With gentle instruction, she quartered the apples, turned on the stove, added the cinnamon and nutmeg and worked the grinder. She ate it with no help at all.



Alan Zale for The New York Times

At the Lighthouse in White Plains, Harold James and Amanie Riley worked with an apple.

Brenda Wilkin, Abbott House's director of development and community relations. "We also took some children from our residential program to see the show."

After the bows were taken (some of the actors were Music in Chappaqua students, others paid professionals), Abbott House officials addressed the audience about foster care. Ms. Wilkin said at least one audience member had already contacted her about becoming a foster parent.

"This spoke to me," Ms. Angier said. "I like the idea of art not just being entertainment but of art actually being able to do some good in society."

A Second Sight

Like other 11-year-olds, Amanie Riley loves to bake cookies and treats for her family and then sit back and bask in the compliments. But unlike most budding chefs, Amanie learned her cooking technique at Lighthouse International, which runs a Saturday program for visually impaired 6- to 13-year-olds at its offices in White Plains.

Amanie is blind, but she knows how to wield an egg beater, a knife and a spatula, and she is being taught how to use a spe-

Calling All River Cleaners

The Hudson River, on the other hand, can always use help. Scenic Hudson's 8th Annual River Sweep takes place this week along the river's edge from Manhattan to the Adirondacks.

In the seven previous sweeps, a total of 30,000 volunteers have carted away more than 300 tons of trash, said Andy Bicking, director of education and volunteers for Scenic Hudson.

"It is really an incredible community effort," Mr. Bicking said. "It demonstrates people's enthusiasm for the environment and their love for the river."

There are cleanups organized in many Westchester locations from April 16 to April 24. Some of the biggest will be held at the Beczak Environmental Center in Yonkers, the riverfront green in Peekskill and Senasqua Park in Croton-on-Hudson.

To join these or other cleanups, visit greatriversweep.org and choose among several times, dates and locations.

"Mostly we find household trash, cans, bottles, or fishing and boating debris," Mr. Bicking said. "But one time we found a motorcycle buried vertically in a stream bed, and another time we found a whole flock of plastic owl lawn ornaments, so you never know."